

Winter 2020

## Theatre UNI Alumni Newsletter, Fall 2020-Spring 2021

University of Northern Iowa. Department of Theatre.

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# THEATREUNI ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

Winter 2020 - Spring 2021

## IN THIS ISSUE

**2** | **LETTER FROM THE  
DEPARTMENT HEAD**  
Eric Lange

**3** | **MEET OUR  
NEW FACULTY**

**5** | **TO TOUCH  
THE MOON**

**9** | **A CLASS IN  
STAGE COMBAT**

**10** | **ALUMNI PROFILES**  
Michael Boudewyns, Sarah  
Noll Wilson, Erika Kuhn,  
Michaela Nelson, Tori Rezek,  
Marjorie Gast, Melia Beschta

**23** | **STURGIS YOUTH  
THEATRE 20TH  
ANNIVERSARY**

**24** | **GUEST ARTIST PROFILE**  
Chris Wood

**25** | **NEW ORGANIZATION:**  
UNI Multicultural  
Theatrical Society (MTS)

**26** | **MEET THE  
MONSTERS**

**27** | **A NEW PARTNERSHIP**  
Denver Center for the  
Performing Arts

**28** | **VIRTUAL THEATRE**  
Alumni performances during  
a pandemic

**32** | **FACULTY PUBLICATIONS**  
Dr. Amy Osatinski's book on  
Disney Theatre

**33** | **ORIGINAL FACULTY WORK  
AND WOMEN IN SCIENCE  
AND THE ARTS PANEL**

**34** | **LEGACY OF  
LIGHT**

**35** | **DONOR PROFILES**  
The Karbula Family,  
Dianne Phelps

### ON THE COVER

TheatreUNI production of *To Touch the Moon*

**UNI**

University of Northern Iowa  
Department of Theatre



# A LETTER FROM THE DEPARTMENT HEAD



Eric Lange

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“While we can be grateful for the way that technology has enabled some of our classes to shift online, I think we will all be exceedingly more grateful when we can again find opportunities for the types of connection, community and congregation that are at the heart of our art form.”

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Dear TheatreUNI Alumni and Friends,

I hope this much-delayed letter finds you in good health and enjoying the beginning of 2021. Like many things, this newsletter has been so long in coming together because of “the big pivot” – that is, the shift of attention and energies required as we navigate our way through teaching and creating art in the midst of the pandemic. In March of last year we locked down along with the rest of the country and found innovative but challenging ways to deliver our course goals to students. We had to cancel our final production of the 2019/20 season, *Romeo and Juliet*, which was to have toured to several locales to play to high school students. Fortunately, we were able to bring the project forward as a staged reading at the beginning of this school year which was performed to an invited (and limited!) audience and filmed for streaming. The streaming version will reach more high school students than we ever could have if a physical tour had been possible.

Unfortunately, the COVID reality caused us to cancel our hosting of the Iowa Thespians Festival this year. We missed the throngs of students trekking from building to building on the UNI campus for shows, workshops, and competitions, and very much look forward to their return when possible.

The Fall 2020 semester ended before Thanksgiving, preventing the need for students to travel home and then return to campus. We even used the Saturday before Thanksgiving as a final exam day. We are pursuing a similarly condensed semester right now. Classes started on January 25, and there will be no Spring Break as we barrel through to finish things out by the first week of May.

During this current semester we are creating a filmed theatrical experience called *Dream With ME*, a student-driven,

devised, multimedia, filmed theatrical work about the varied yet related events of 2020 including but not limited to: the pandemic, isolation, race and power, climate change, natural disaster, etc. In order to guide the creative process, we will be utilizing and exploring genres of storytelling such as Hip Hop Theatre, Documentary Theatre, Theatre of the Oppressed, and Theatre for Social Change. The intention of *Dream With ME* is to further our commitment to an inclusive and equitable world while highlighting how theatre can inspire our community and incite change.

While we can be grateful for the way that technology has enabled some of our classes to shift online, I think we will all be exceedingly more grateful when science (aka, a vaccine) gets us to the point where we can again find opportunities for the types of connection, community and congregation that are at the heart of our art form.

The pandemic also interrupted our plan for the next TheatreUNI Alumni Reunion – which was to have coincided with a production of the musical *Cinderella* this April. Rest assured, during the 2021-22 season we will host a reunion – even if it’s the biggest Zoom gathering of TheatreUNI alumni ever!

I hope you enjoy the updates in the newsletter, and that you’ll reach out any time you would like more information or plan to be in the area.

All the best in 2021!

Eric Lange, Head  
Department of Theatre

# MEET OUR NEW FACULTY

In the 2018-2019 school year TheatreUNI welcomed two new members to the department, Assistant Professor of Theatre Jim Bray and Production Manager Katy McGlaughlin. Both Bray and McGlaughlin recently completed MFAs in Acting and Stage Management respectively. Jim graduated from Kent State University in Ohio and Katy is a proud Hawkeye from the University of Iowa. Both are members of Actors Equity Association, the union for Actors and Stage Managers.

**Jim Bray** is an award-winning actor, director and singer. Before attending graduate school, Jim lived in New York City and worked with various regional theatres around the country and toured with productions stateside and internationally. He is a certified instructor of the Sanford Meisner approach to acting, and is developing his pedagogical work in Michael Chekhov, Clowning, Viewpoints and Equity and Anti-Racist practices.

In December 2019, Jim was one of twenty-five performers selected from around the world to train for a weekend at SIT Company in NYC with Viewpoints creator and director Anne Bogart.

In the Summer of 2020, Bray was invited to perform in the World Premiere musical *33 1/3* at Dobama Theatre in Cleveland, Ohio. The play takes place in and out of the present and 1974 and tells the story of small-town high schooler, Jules McMillan, and the importance rock 'n roll played in his coming of age story while coming to terms with being gay. Jim played both Older Jules (who narrates this musical look back on his life) as well as Jules' Father.

"Bray is a dynamic actor. His charm is undeniable, as is his talent. He shifts between the storyteller and father personas with graceful ease. His acting is completely on point, and his voice is glorious in tone, and emotional clarity." – Cleveland Stage Alliance, 2019

Most recently, Professor Bray made his UNI directorial debut with the smash hit *You Can't Take It With You*. Watching him create a strong ensemble, delicately handling dated material, all while infusing

the actors with a fresh understanding of the rigor that one finds in a three act comedy, sets a high bar for his forthcoming projects.

In Spring 2021, Bray and Professor Gretta Berghammer will direct *Dream With ME*, a student-devised and completely filmed production exploring events of 2020 including: the pandemic, isolation, racism, bias and the power of hope. The goal of *Dream with ME* is to further our commitment to an inclusive and equitable world while highlighting how theatre can inspire our community and incite change. A strong advocate for diversity and inclusion, Professor Bray founded and advises TheatreUNI's newest student organization, the Multicultural Theatrical Society; an organization meant to represent underrepresented performers and technicians across multiple disciplines of theatre.

This summer, Professor Bray completed a three week teacher training in Clowning with Chris Bayes (world renowned movement instructor at Yale Drama), completed 18 hours in Intimacy Training

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Jim Bray

## How did you get started in theatre?

I loved singing; I was always singing. I performed in plays and musicals throughout grade school and my grandparents both studied at Julliard and were trained in opera, so I think they probably rubbed off on me somewhere. However, my drama teacher in high school, Carole Midura, was the first person who made me realize that I could actually make theatre for a living. Before that, it was merely a dream. I studied Musical Theatre and Professional Acting at East Carolina University and then I took the leap to NYC.

## What brought you to/what do you appreciate about TheatreUNI?

The strong sense of collaboration I feel with my colleagues in our department is special. I am so grateful. To have the kind of support these inspiring artists offer is no small thing. To have such support in *any* department on *any* campus is rare. In my opinion, the only way successful theatre is created is through honest, generous collaboration; and we have an abundance. I'm happy to have found that here. I also appreciate the strong dedication to teaching here at UNI. Coming to UNI in my first year having the colloquium for new faculty was an incredible resource, and I value UNI's commitment and encouragement to expanding our resources as educators.

## What do you do for fun?

Antique shopping, singing, yoga, dreaming up stories, playing with my super dog, Penny Lane.

# MEET OUR NEW FACULTY (continued)

and Boundary practice with TIE (Theatrical Intimacy Education), and attended countless workshops and seminars on Equity and Anti-Racist training for theatre educators. Jim also presented on two panels at the Association for Theatre in Higher Education's annual conference, and was named a Member at Large with ATHE's Theatre and Social Change Focus Group. He is also a member of the Acting Focus Group, the Black Theatre Association and the Association of Movement Instructors. [www.JimBray.net](http://www.JimBray.net)

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**Katy McGlaughlin** has worked professionally across the country and is the co-author of *Stage Management Basics: A primer for performing arts stage managers* which is currently being updated for a second edition. Most recently Katy stage managed the Northeastern regional premier of *Curve of Departure* starring Raye Birk and Ami Brabson at Chester Theatre Company in Chester Massachusetts.

At UNI, Katy has enjoyed working with the faculty teaching the Foundations of Theatre Class to expand the lab portion to include more hands-on training for the show crew positions and she has stepped up as the co-advisor for the UNI Student Theatre Association.



Katy McGlaughlin

## How did you get started in theatre?

I was born into it. Both of my parents were actors and I started attending theatre when I was only months old. I was in a few shows but really fell in love with technical theatre and spent every summer of my childhood building and running shows.

## What brought you to/what do you appreciate about TheatreUNI?

I was certain that after grad school in Iowa City I would move far, far, away from the Midwest but then this job got posted and I started researching and fell in love with the town and the job description was right up my alley. After my on-campus interview, I knew that this was my place. I've seen a lot of college theatre departments and none of them have been as collegial and pleasant as TheatreUNI. I am truly blessed to be a part of this department.

## What do you do for fun?

When I'm at home I read cuddled up on my couch with my two kitties, but my partner teaches at the University of South Dakota so, often, in my free time I am driving across the state to visit him and get puppy cuddles. I also love playing board games, teaching yoga, and going to the gym.



# TO TOUCH THE MOON



Just over 50 years ago, millions of people across the globe watched from their televisions as astronaut Neil Armstrong walked on the moon—a landmark achievement of human ambition that gave way to those immortal words: “That’s one small step for [a] man, one giant leap for mankind.”

Department of Theatre faculty member Gretta Berghammer remembers watching the first lunar landing unfold on her family’s tiny black and white television.

Everything about the Apollo 11 voyage captured her 13-year-old imagination and curiosity.



Fifty years later, Gretta set out to create a highly interactive, fully immersive theatre experience for young people designed to recapture that same level of excitement, curiosity and discovery she felt as a young person witnessing the moon landing. The result: *To Touch the Moon*, a highly creative, immersion theatre production. Specifically designed for youth with autism and other exceptionalities AND their typically developing peers, the production incorporates best practices for incorporating multi-sensory explorations within a highly engaging, interactive, and individualized immersive theatre experience. The audience, limited to 15 youth, becomes an active part of the story. Working in collaboration with a team of actors, the audience participants explore three different episodes. Each 45-minute episode provides a different dramatic narrative that was part of the journey to “touch” the moon: creation, exploration, and lunar landing. *To Touch the Moon* blended the creativity and theatricality of live performance with the experimentation of the sciences in the collaborative pursuit of discovery.



The entire production was devised by a group of 21 UNI Theatre students representing four emphasis areas: Design and Production, Performance, Drama/Theatre for Youth and Communication/Theatre Arts Teaching.

The company worked from September to April, researching, devising, writing,

editing, and eventually rehearsing, the story spines that eventually became each episode of *To Touch the Moon*. Prior to the devising process, Gretta Berghammer, and colleague Mark Parrott, scenic designer for the production, traveled as guests of NASA to the Marshall Space Flight Center, in Huntsville, AL, and Mission Control in Houston, TX. Berghammer and Parrott conducted on site research for the project, including opportunities to meet with a variety of NASA staff members including historians, moon rock experts, varied engineers, and museum specialists. Space journalist Andrew Chaikin was a frequent contributor to the project. Students used his seminal work *A Man on the Moon* as a text book and Mr. Chaikin “skyped” with the students on two occasions in order to answer questions and share insights.

Episode One explored creation stories about the moon. Audience and actors assumed roles as members of a modern-day exploration assigned the task of learning as much as possible about a newly discovered “nature setting.” Audience participants worked with the actors to “catalogue” the environment. Once the work was completed, the group gathered around a fire circle to share creation stories about the moon using drums, rain sticks, recorders, movement, story, and shadow puppetry.

Episode Two focused on problems that NASA needed to solve in the months immediately preceding the first lunar landing. Audience participants and actors assumed the roles of NASA engineers, astronauts, researchers, etc. working and training at Building Nine at Mission Control. Audience participants visited six “Astronaut Training” stations in order to train for their moon mission. Station experiences included: 1) how to select the best rock and soil samples from the lunar surface; 2) how to operate a variety of rock and soil collection tools; 3) how to estimate the weight of selected rocks in each of the three environments: moon, space, and earth; 4) how to set up experiments on the moon’s surface in lunar exploration “gear;” 5) how to operate body cameras in order to record lunar events and objects; 6) how to operate the landing control panels in the LEM.

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Episode Three took place on the surface of the moon. Audience and actors assumed the roles of astronauts on the moon OR members of the Houston Mission Control Flight Center. Communication from Mission Control personnel guided the astronauts as they worked to place the commemorative plaque, erect the US Flag, set up experiments, collect rocks and soil, pack rock and soil samples for the return flight to earth, film the lunar exploration work, and leave personal mementos.

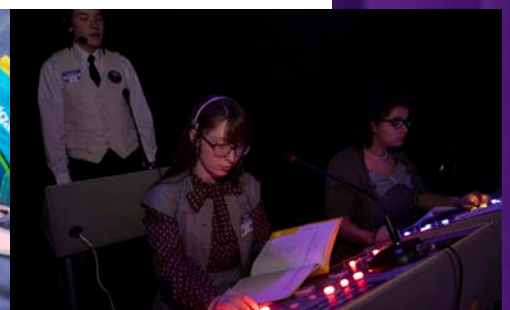
The goal of episodes Two and Three was to recreate, with as much authenticity as the theatre will allow, the work and events that were part of Apollo 11.

90 youth aged 8-12, including a target population of those with autism and other developmental delays, attended the production which included four school-based performances and two public performances. (NOTE: a performance includes all three “episodes”).

The project was heavily supported from a variety of local granting agencies: The Guernsey and Community Foundation of NE Iowa, private donors, NASA/Iowa Space Consortium, and the University of Northern Iowa.

A number of departments across campus contributed to the production including: Communication Sciences and Disorders (communication materials relevant to youth with exceptionalities); Regent’s Center for Early Childhood Education (research on the impact of production attendance on concept mapping and word/language/communication use); UNI Public Art Incubator (construction of the wood dome which housed episodes I and III); and the UNI Technology Lab (construction of the LEM and Mission Control “consoles”).

The entire process was captured in a heartwarming documentary which can be viewed [here](#).





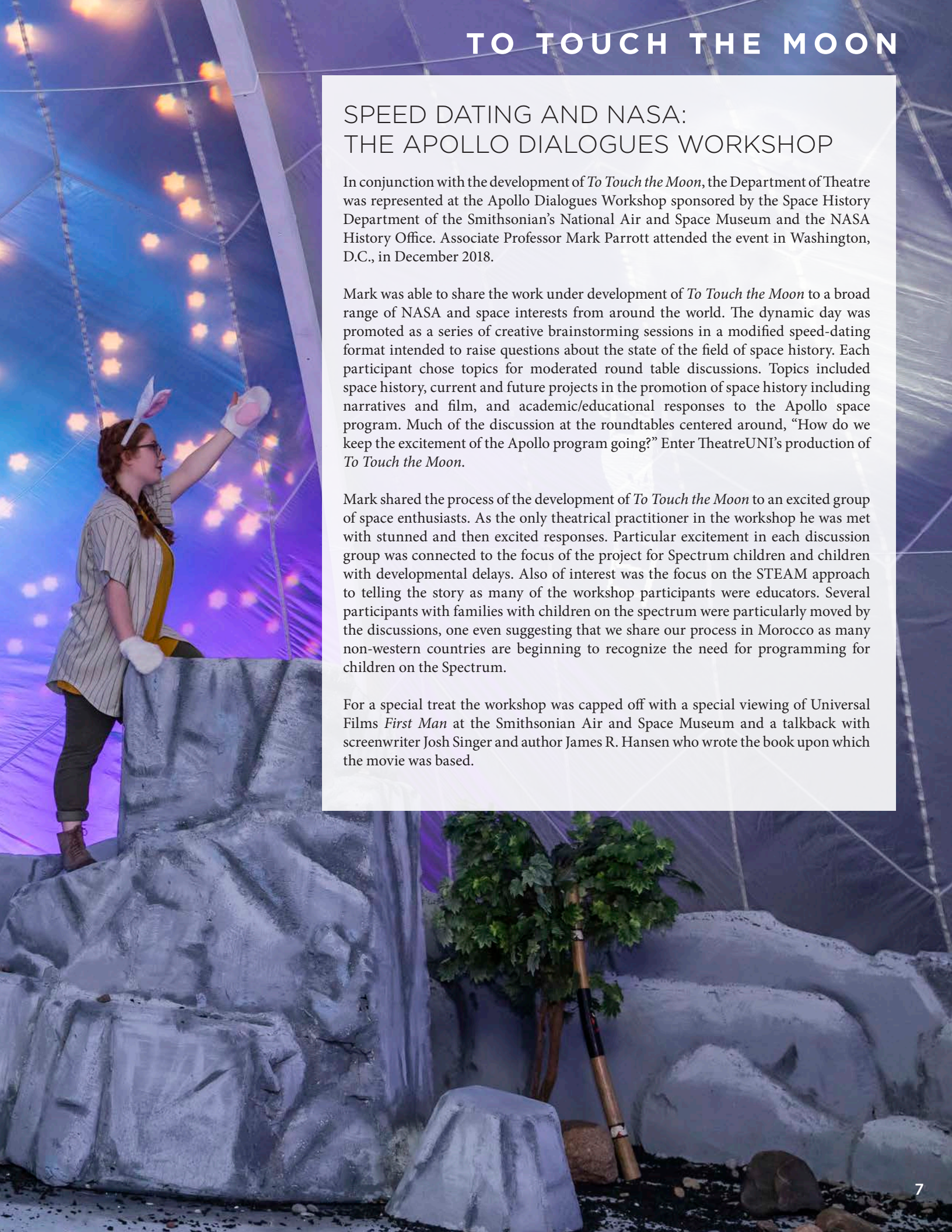
## SPEED DATING AND NASA: THE APOLLO DIALOGUES WORKSHOP

In conjunction with the development of *To Touch the Moon*, the Department of Theatre was represented at the Apollo Dialogues Workshop sponsored by the Space History Department of the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum and the NASA History Office. Associate Professor Mark Parrott attended the event in Washington, D.C., in December 2018.

Mark was able to share the work under development of *To Touch the Moon* to a broad range of NASA and space interests from around the world. The dynamic day was promoted as a series of creative brainstorming sessions in a modified speed-dating format intended to raise questions about the state of the field of space history. Each participant chose topics for moderated round table discussions. Topics included space history, current and future projects in the promotion of space history including narratives and film, and academic/educational responses to the Apollo space program. Much of the discussion at the roundtables centered around, "How do we keep the excitement of the Apollo program going?" Enter TheatreUNI's production of *To Touch the Moon*.

Mark shared the process of the development of *To Touch the Moon* to an excited group of space enthusiasts. As the only theatrical practitioner in the workshop he was met with stunned and then excited responses. Particular excitement in each discussion group was connected to the focus of the project for Spectrum children and children with developmental delays. Also of interest was the focus on the STEAM approach to telling the story as many of the workshop participants were educators. Several participants with families with children on the spectrum were particularly moved by the discussions, one even suggesting that we share our process in Morocco as many non-western countries are beginning to recognize the need for programming for children on the Spectrum.

For a special treat the workshop was capped off with a special viewing of Universal Films *First Man* at the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum and a talkback with screenwriter Josh Singer and author James R. Hansen who wrote the book upon which the movie was based.





# INCLUSIVE COSTUMING: (AD)DRESSING THE NEEDS OF THE ACTORS AND THE AUDIENCE

*To Touch the Moon* also presented interesting challenges for our design team, as both scenic authenticity and costuming an audience of unknown size were extremely important to the experience. Design faculty member Jennifer Sheshko Wood oversaw the costume design of the production and the specific details of Episode III, with colleagues Amy RohrBerg and Katrina Sandvik taking the lead on Episodes I and II respectively.

The idea of inclusive costuming came from discussions with the performers, in that as they created their historical or imagined characters, the costume design faculty spun designs in real time to their creation. Performers had input into the gender identification and silhouettes of their characters. Simultaneously, the costume design team created garments and accessories for the audience participants. While each performance would be limited to fifteen audience members, their ages, sizes and motor functionality would vary with each day and so the costume studio built or bought a variety of items to accommodate their needs.

Part I was mostly prop heavy. Scenic and costumes provided color-coded string bags for each exploratory team member, filled with the necessary tools with which to complete their exploratory mission. For Part II, as NASA astronauts in training, each participant wore a pale blue NASA hoodie (fig. 1), stenciled in-house by students in the costume studio. All size labels were removed to accommodate the tactilely sensitive participants, and for those who may experience motor control difficulty, or who were in wheelchairs, a number of hoodies opened up the center back to allow for easier dressing. Part III was the most detailed dressing for each audience participant. They were assigned either to the Astronaut side, or to the Mission Control side and were prepared by student actors at each station. For Mission Control, each participant wore a vest color-coded to their astronaut team: Red, Green, Yellow, Blue or Purple (fig. 2) with Velcro strips ready for the Mission/*To Touch the Moon* patch and the NASA patch. The studio bought vests in a range of sizes of each color, and made sure that a number of them could open up the center back as well.

The astronaut costumes were more extensive and the costume studio began building these early in the spring semester. Both to look like parts of the NASA uniform and to also act as a comfort coat, each astronaut vest was cut from quilted duvets and additionally quilted by students (fig.3). The studio altered commercial patterns to create the various sizes. Along with making some open up the center back, each vest was additionally customizable with a front zipper placket that could be swapped out for another closure if that audience participant preferred a method other than the zipper. Each vest had Velcro at the shoulders ready to code them to a specific color team matching their actor partner.

Each participant then received appropriately sized gloves (figs. 4 & 5), astronaut boots that had a special tread added to the bottom to create a footprint in moon dust, a headset with which to communicate back to Mission Control, and then the choice to add a Snoopy Cap over top. Each cap had a chinstrap that could click a few different ways for the participants' comfort. The astronaut boots (fig. 6) were bought items that the costume studio reconfigured for the needs of the production. As bought costume pieces, they were intended to be worn over shoes and had no soles of their own, but since an element of the experience was to recreate a very specific footprint in Episode III, the studio attached soles to all of the boots for both the participants and the actors. Using rubber door matting bought in bulk, they created the different sole sizes and hand stitched them in the bottom of each pair of boots. In order to facilitate dressing participants in wheelchairs or who had difficulty with balance, the studio also altered some of the boots to open up the center back and be snapped on easily.

*To Touch the Moon* stretched TheatreUNT's costume faculty and studio to investigate new ways of dressing people, to think ahead towards accommodating unknown sizes and numbers, and exposed the students to new and different materials or techniques. While much was built, many existing pieces were altered to accommodate the needs of the performers and of the audience. This experience proved that theatre can include the needs of neuro-atypical audience members and it was exciting to see parents and children alike respond to the level of detail as they were immersed into each episode.



fig. 1



fig. 2



fig. 3

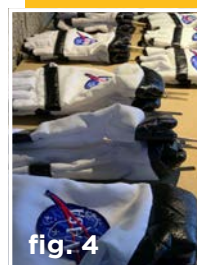


fig. 4

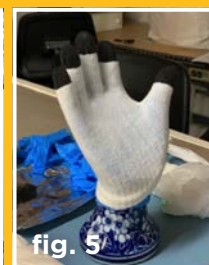


fig. 5



fig. 6





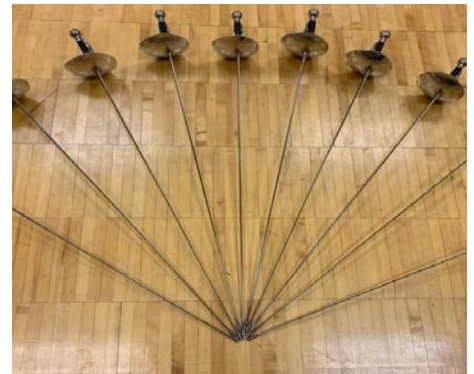
In the spring of 2019, TheatreUNI offered students an opportunity to take a Stage Combat course. This was the third time since 2014 that faculty member Matthew J Weedman was able to teach Stage Combat which had not been offered as a course at UNI in over a decade previously.

Stage combat is a specialized technique in theatre designed to create the illusion of physical combat without causing harm to the performers. It is employed in live stage plays as well as operatic and ballet productions. Students in this course learned unarmed combat, knife and dagger and the type of single sword fighting techniques sometimes called “Swashbuckling,” or “Hollywood.”

“Many shows have scenes of violence and this class was a place to understand how to approach it safely,” said senior Marjorie Gast. “Stage combat is choreography and this course highlighted the importance of trusting and working with your partner.” Indeed, safety was the primary goal of the course as students learned techniques of masking blows, maintaining correct distances and targeting and “knapping” (creating sounds that simulate the noises of combat).

Each day in the course begins with conditioning drills which could last from thirty minutes to one hour. Students ran the stairs of the UNI-Dome, competed in push-up challenges and went through the series of bodyweight exercises that the class fondly called “Russian Yoga.” After these extensive warmups, the class would then move on to techniques. Each unit concluded with a scene, created and acted by the students in partnership with each other, in which they would incorporate a set number of the techniques for each skill.

As TheatreUNI continues to explore staging productions which might contain scenes of violence, courses like Stage Combat will give students a base of knowledge that will help them create safe working conditions. Junior Erika Bailey said of the class, “As a theatre student I would rank this class as vital. Yes, it is fun to play with knives and swords, but it taught students to be physically in tune with their body. We don’t get to talk about the physical in many of our classes – or it is simply pushed to the side as something that we will talk about later. Stage combat is literally all about the physical.”







Michael Boudewyns

## A REALLY INVENTIVE CAREER: MICHAEL BOUDEWYNS AND HIS ORCHESTRAL ODYSSEY

by Eric Lange

*Peter and the Wolf.*  
*The Story of Babar.*  
*The Toy Symphony.*  
*The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra.*  
*Tubby the Tuba.*  
*Green Eggs and Ham.*

What do all these titles have in common? Well, they're children's favorites, to be sure. But they're also some of the titles that drive UNI graduate Michael Boudewyns' (1989) creative life and livelihood.

At UNI, Michael says he was drawn to invent performances. "I had a lot of creative freedom in college. It was fun and playful, but I also took away really useful lessons. I was always interested in figuring out how to use my creativity and enthusiasm. Teachers like Gretta, Tom Carlisle, and Jay Edelnant helped me do that. I was allowed and encouraged to devise performances."

"Gretta Berghammer helped me develop a one-person show with some juggling, and some mime — which I brought to elementary schools." Michael recounts how Gretta — who has always worked as an advocate for the arts in schools — helped him figure out how to do effective outreach. Michael credits the wide range of experiences he had at UNI for much of his success.

Michael recalls a particularly helpful bit of advice from Jay. He was working on a project for a performance class. He sat in the Acting Practice Room (now the Phelps Acting Practice Room) frustrated because the scene needed a small tree, and he didn't know how to get one. Jay explained to him that you don't need the actual thing — just something that represents it, like a tree made from newspaper.

Michael draws upon many theatre experiences at UNI (main stage shows, classes, studio series, summer theatre), and credits them as the beginning of the path that led to what he does today: creating pieces of theatre for young audiences that he and his wife (Sara Valentine, who he married in 2005) devise and perform with orchestras across North America.

Michael attended graduate school at the PTTP (Professional Theatre Training Program) at the University of Delaware. "I was part of the first PTTP class at the University of Delaware. The PTTP was originally located in Milwaukee, WI — but the University of Delaware brought the entire grad program there in 1989. It was focused, demanding, and intense. I loved it." Michael graduated from the PTTP in 1992.

Michael's wife Sara also received her degree from PTTP in 2007. She is currently the Chair of Theatre at the University of Southern Maine.

After graduate school, Michael went to Baltimore to help friends from PTTP start the Baltimore Shakespeare Festival. It was then that the primary focus of Michael's current work started.

It started with museums. "Wilmington, Delaware, had a children's museum, and I pitched the idea of a touring theatre production" based on an exhibit about the physics of sound. They said yes. He created a Danny Kaye-inspired Austrian science professor (a character that Michael would use many more times in the future) to tell the science story, and toured the Mid-Atlantic states.

His next museum stop was the Delaware Art Museum. Michael approached them about making a show for the museum. They were not interested initially, but later called him when they had an exhibit of illustrations from children's books. The museum invited him to read a story or two; instead, Michael designed a performance. Michael drew inspiration from Sesame Street and Elmo's World, which he watched with his kids. He designed a Buster Keaton/Charlie Chaplin-type outfit with a suitcase, an easel, and a golden frame. Out comes one book at a time, placed in the gold frame on the easel, and then Michael performs the story like a monologue — classic children's books, such as *Madeline* by Ludwig Bemelmans, and *Harold and the Purple Crayon* by Crockett Johnson. The performance ended with *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown. The families were invited to recite along — they did enthusiastically.

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# ALUMNI PROFILE: MICHAEL BOUDEWYNS

Michael then started getting calls from elementary schools. He devised longer performances. The Delaware Art Museum continued to ask Michael to create performances for them. One time they had an exhibit of the works of John Tenniel, the original illustrator of *Alice in Wonderland*. Michael memorized Chapter 7 (the iconic mad tea-party) and invented a performance using a chair, a coffee table and three hats: one for the Mad Hatter, one for the March Hare, and one for the Dormouse. He was narrator of a virtuoso one-person tea party, switching hats as he went from character to character.

One of the head librarians for the Delaware Division of Libraries happened to see him perform this piece. They hired Michael to tour to all thirty-four libraries in the state. Every summer for ten years, Michael memorized seven or eight books and toured to libraries throughout Delaware, Pennsylvania, Maryland and New Jersey. During this time he also established a

connection with Enchantment Theatre Company in Philadelphia – a company that incorporates magic into their shows – and worked on projects like “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice”, in which Michael played the Sorcerer’s Apprentice with the Philadelphia Orchestra as part of their 100th birthday celebration.

In 2003, the Philadelphia Orchestra was looking for a host for a family concert featuring movie music, and asked Michael to audition. They wanted people to audition with a story. Michael arrived with the suitcase and his Keatonesque garb. He saw a rich diversity of people from all sorts of different backgrounds: African-American, Native American, and Chinese-American storytellers. Michael began to feel that maybe he wasn’t what the orchestra was looking for.

He auditioned with *The Cat in the Hat* by Dr. Seuss. He knew people make a judgment within a minute. He expected

to get cut off, but they let him perform the entire ten-minute story – and they hired him! Michael was invited to pitch playful ways to introduce various pieces of music in a family concert with the Philadelphia Orchestra. The orchestra picked what ideas they liked, then Michael crafted those ideas into a performance that went great. This was the beginning of a long partnership. Michael has performed with the Philadelphia Orchestra for twelve seasons, and has toured to Vail, Colorado, twice with them.

That relationship led to an invitation to a New Jersey orchestra to perform Sam-I-Am in *Green Eggs and Ham*. There were only two rehearsals and no stage director – only the orchestra, a soprano, and Michael. “I quickly invented how to stage it, and figured out the choreography and the costumes. With only two rehearsals, I didn’t know how to memorize an orchestra score, so I drew hieroglyphics in my *Green Eggs and Ham* book to remind me of

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Photo: R. Cort



# ALUMNI PROFILE: MICHAEL BOUDEWYNS

physical cues during the music.” It went great, so much so that they invited him back to do “The Story of Babar”. Michael improvised it with a box of props. The orchestra loved it, and extended another invitation: *Peter and the Wolf*.

Michel and Sara knew there was a lot at stake for something delightful to show up. In 2005, they sat down and designed a solo piece of vaudeville-inspired theatre. They used a suitcase, a feather duster, a baseball hat, a yellow silk, and toilet plungers. Throw in a coat rack, two stools, and piece by piece they “invented” how to perform *Peter and the Wolf* as the orchestra played.

Since 2004, in addition to performing numerous family concerts, Michael and Sara have invented at least one similar orchestra project each year. They are given full artistic license for design, staging and performance. Their company, called Really Inventive Stuff, also includes another performer who grew up in Iowa - soprano Kimberly Schoreder. (Sara Valentine proudly grew up in Massachusetts.)

In 2007, Michael started reaching out to other orchestras. The Richmond Symphony Orchestra in Virginia, and the Annapolis Symphony Orchestra in Maryland responded and booked Really Inventive Stuff. Other orchestras followed suit across the country, as well as in Canada, England and Singapore.

When planning a season, orchestras might program “Tubby the Tuba” or “The Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra” without knowing who the narrator will be. Michael tracks this, and inquires if they’d be interested in hiring Really Inventive Stuff. About half of the 51 orchestras they work with started with a cold contact.

Today, they have eleven productions in their repertoire that they tour and perform. Eleven productions that they’ve created in their studio and rehearsal space: their house. “It’s easy to think that if you don’t have a space that looks exactly a certain way you are unable to create props or costumes or rehearse – and that if you don’t have this or that you can’t do it – but the truth is you can create anything wherever you want!”

In March, Michael was supposed to have traveled to Jacksonville to perform *Peter and the Wolf*. As with most live events across the country, the show was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Happily, the 2020-21 season is booking orchestra performances in Milwaukee, Detroit, Saint Louis, Richmond, Jacksonville, New Hampshire and New Jersey.

Michael offers some advice for today’s Theatre students:

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“Go attend events. As a college student, I made the mistake of being a ‘selfish egotistical performer.’ I own that. There were numerous productions in the Music Department – I did not go see them. I wasn’t cast in *Cabaret* – I did not go see it. I didn’t go to orchestral or jazz concerts. I didn’t go to art exhibitions. I didn’t go to readings in the English department. Take advantage of the creative things happening at UNI. You never know what you might be able to draw upon.”

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“Also, don’t wait for someone to hire you to receive permission to use your creativity. Start inventing now, in college. You only need to be courageous. In order to have a lifelong, fulfilling career you’ll need to take ownership of your imagination, and start doing and devising. UNI has facilities and amazing faculty that are available to you right now.

“Finally, even though you’re busy – DO YOUR HOMEWORK. If you are a creative person who has a career, you will always have homework. You’re going to need to figure out rent, gas, cell phone AND how to do your research, practice your instrument and learn your lines. Life will never be less busy — just filled with different activities. Developing a work habit in college is one of the useful tools you’ll need no matter what you do. For example, every day I review my orchestra music and texts. These are compositions I’ve performed since 2004, and I know them by heart; but I still review pieces every morning for two hours as part of my routine to begin each day.”

Michael has created a class he delivers at the University of Southern Maine that explores where inspiration comes from, and how you keep “refilling your well” across your whole life as a creative person. It seems he’s been very successful doing just that.





Sarah Noll Wilson

## CHRONICALLY CURIOUS: A CHAT WITH SARAH NOLL WILSON

by Gretta Berghammer

Every year potential theatre majors visit the department to learn about our program. Tucked away into every prospective student information folder is a one page handout designed to answer the question, the one that is asked by nearly every parent who visits with their student: “So, if this theatre thing doesn’t work out what else can my student do with a theatre degree?”

After spending an hour visiting with alum Sarah Noll Wilson (class of 2003), it’s clear the department can add Leadership Development Coach to the list. Founder and CEO (Chief Edge Officer), Sarah Noll Wilson is on a mission to help leaders understand themselves and their teams on a whole new level of understanding and closeness. Her goal is to empower leaders to understand and honor the beautiful complexity of the humans they serve. Through her work as an executive coach, an in-demand keynote speaker both nationally and internationally, an avid reader and, researcher, not to mention soon to be author, Sarah helps leaders, mostly from the world of business, close the gap between what they intend to do and the actual impact they make at work and in life.

Through her workshops, individual coaching and small group work, Sarah creates a safe, honest environment that prepares people to deal with real-world conflict, have more meaningful conversations and create purposeful relationships.

Working with CEOs, HR leaders and organizations that care deeply about their employees and understand the connection between employee development, employee satisfaction and organizational success, Sarah specializes in transforming relationships from good to great.

At the center of Sarah’s work is a commitment to “staying chronically curious,” an approach to life, in and outside of work, that I believe Sarah has pursued since her freshman year at UNI! So, in the spirit of meeting her curiosity with a bit of my own, I spent an hour with Sarah this spring exploring questions I was curious about. Below is an excerpt from that conversation.

### How did your undergraduate degree in theatre contribute to your work today?

My studies at UNI included both Performance and Drama/Theatre for Youth. Both have contributed significantly to my career. Actor/theatre training is rooted in self awareness and that is the core of the coaching work that I do. The teaching and leading experience I got from my D/TFY emphasis definitely contributed to developing my self confidence when getting in front of a group, being in that moment so that I can respond authentically to the needs of the group wherever they are. It’s knowing that I can have a plan for a workshop or a coaching session, but that I have the ability to deviate from that plan in order to best support the work or conversation that is needed right then.

That happened all the time in my D/TFY experiences and in the improv work I explored all through school and for a number of years after I graduated. All of my theatre training taught me how to tell stories. It taught me how to make learning engaging and active. TheatreUNI showed me so many ways to make connections to others: how to accept and share offers; how to “yes, and” an idea. Getting up in front of people or working with CEOs just doesn’t seem that different to me than my undergraduate work on stage, in an improv show or in a theatre for youth workshop session!

You know, I moved to Des Moines after graduation because I wanted to do some theatre there, especially improv. But, of course, I had to find a good paying job with some benefits. In Des Moines, that often means a job in the insurance world.

I landed a job at ING. At the time, I didn’t know that this world of professional training and education for business professionals even existed. I found myself required to attend some team building workshops and presentations and began to wonder if I could apply my theatre background to making insurance training more interesting; more engaging. When ING gave me the chance to do just that, I jumped at the opportunity.

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# ALUMNI PROFILE: SARAH NOLL WILSON

I began to pay attention to power dynamics in the business world of work. I felt that there wasn't as much humanity in the business world as I felt there could be. I felt that there had to be a better way to lead people. I decided I wanted to support leaders to be that kind of person. I enrolled in the MA program in Leadership Development at Drake University. That program really helped solidify ways in which leaders could be different. I got curious! How do we develop the whole person, not just a role/position within a company. And that, with time, led to the development of my own leadership development company, Sarah Noll Wilson, Inc.

## **How do you stay curious?**

I don't even have to try; I am so fascinated by people and our complexities and understanding how we "show up," that I am always reading things and talking to people. I am always trying to learn new things; to learn and develop new content. I am so hungry about learning about humans!

I have seen first hand the negative impact of people not being present; of not having conversations; of not being empathetic; the negative of what happens when people don't fully show up at work. Courage, compassion and curiosity are at the core of the kinds of workplaces that I am trying to help.

## **What do you love most about the work you are doing today?**

I love all of it! I do, I really do. If I had to boil it down and choose just one thing, I would say I really love that I'm getting to build a company designed for humans that embraces the neurodiversity of the people I work for and with. I also love that "aha" moment when you see a person you are coaching behave bravely, take a risk; be courageous in their life.

In her spare time, Sarah is working on a book: *Don't Feed the Elephants: Overcoming the Art of Avoidance to Build Powerful Partnerships*, which she hopes to have published sometime in 2021.

# ALUMNI PROFILE: ERIKA KUHN



Erika Kuhn

INTERVIEW EXCERPT,  
JANUARY 2020

Erika Kuhn is a Twin Cities based actor from Waterloo, Iowa. She has most recently collaborated with New Arab American Theatre Works, Sheep Theatre, Full Circle Theatre Productions, Zephyr Theatre, Umbrella Collective, See-Saw Theatre Lab, and St. Croix Festival Theatre. When not working in the cities, Erika tours the one-woman show *Map of My Kingdom* with Swander Woman Productions in association with AgArts across the US. She can be seen next in Open Window Theatre's production of *The World Over* and Collective Unconscious's production of *Maiden Voyage*. Erika holds a BA in Theatre Performance from the University of Northern Iowa.

**Steve Taft:** Taking that big step to pursue an acting career is sometimes a big challenge for a graduate. What was your first step out of college and what has been your process to building a career in the Twin Cities?

**Erika Kuhn:** Throughout college I had to be working and so it wasn't until my senior year that it became a priority to begin seeking out (theatre) work because suddenly I was going to have the availability. During the Auditioning class we talked about going to the Unified Auditions in the Twin Cities (TCUTA). This audition really intrigued me because I really love the Twin Cities, so when the opportunity to audition at TCUTA came up, I made sure to get there. I got call-backs to a few different places and one of them was for the St. Croix Festival Theatre in Wisconsin. I had heard about them as (UNI graduate) Marjorie Gast had worked there before. I had a call-back with them and they offered me an apprenticeship. The apprenticeship was for the summer. I was involved in all three shows. One musical, two straight plays (one understudy role) and I was trained in their box office and picked up an additional skill and made a little extra money. So, I went up there for that after graduation, Marjorie was there as well and it was really very lovely.

I look back and feel very fortunate that it was my first step into summer rep or a professional company. It's just about an hour from the Twin Cities. The people that I met there were remarkably kind,

generous and their Board President for the theatre provided free housing for me and Marjorie in this beautiful attic across the river from the theatre. It was a magical summer. At the end of that summer, the Interim Artistic Director approached me and asked me to stay on for their fall and winter season. It was an opportunity to make some money, receive free housing and do a couple of more shows (*Death of a Salesman* and *A Radio Play*) and at that time the contract became better in terms of compensation since I was officially a guest artist. My duties were specifically to be an actor. So, I accepted that and stayed for the rest of the year and I got to meet a fresh round of actors and meet people who had been working out of Chicago or Georgia and had a wealth of different experiences. Then the new Artistic Director offered me a show in the spring. I thought that was a good sign. So, I readjusted my bargain and I told myself I need to move (to the Twin Cities) because I told myself I would, and I was planning to move in January, so I said: "How about if I commute? I can get started there and then come back for the show." He said, "OK, stay here four days a week and then go back and forth." As much as I was comfortable there I knew I always had a home there but needed to keep on moving and grooving and see what else I can do.

That first year out of college I didn't really have to audition because once you're with a company they know you. So, now I have to learn "How do I audition aggressively and how do I learn to balance that with having to survive?" So, I just started auditioning like crazy and about two months into that I found a solid day job that paid the bills, was flexible, had free caffeine and was a great situation. And I'd say about three months after I moved to the city, I probably started having decent auditions. Because until you feel safe and comfortable and focused it's hard to have a good audition.

I don't know how many auditions I had to go through before I got my next job offer, but I'd say the first good thing that happened to me was I went to a call for a company called Full Circle Theatre Productions and what caught my eye was that the show was being performed

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# ALUMNI PROFILE: ERIKA KUHN

at The Guthrie in the Dowling Studio. Essentially, it's The Guthrie presenting outside productions. They aid companies that may not have the resources but have a good story to tell and it's a really beautiful thing. At that point in time, my thought process wasn't "I'm going to audition and get this job." I very quickly learned that such a thought process will not work.

And I very quickly learned that I had to make myself enjoy auditioning if I was going to do this indefinitely because 95% of the job is trying to get the job. I think of it as working out. I'm not an athlete necessarily but I think of the play like running a marathon. No one just runs a marathon. They spend ages practicing. So, I just have this thought of auditioning as that's where I go to work out. It's where I get to flex, try out my muscles and new things for when I run that next marathon.

So, I went in did a monologue and they asked questions and were very personable and human with me and I got a call-back. So, I go to the call-back and it's a classic situation of two men for each part and for this one woman's part there's six of us. All of these women were so good. I ended up getting that job. I was working as a barista at the time and I ended up managing that café and I remember getting a call or an email about that job and I just started crying really, really hard and I had to step out and have a cry in the walk-in freezer. As actors we love validation, but that was

my first little kiss of validation. Being talented isn't enough because there's no shortage of talent anywhere. Everybody is working just as hard as you and can offer different things, or more specific things. Those people hired me truly off of an audition which you wished happened a lot, but sometimes it doesn't. It was nice for someone to take a chance on you. It was also my first show working with Equity actors in an Equity house. Everyone in that production was so kind to me.

**ST:** As we wrap up, what advice do you have for students while they're here at UNI?

**EK:** I would say, take advantage of all that UNI has to offer and take a moment to just enjoy all that you have. Take a moment to really look at a beautiful rehearsal space, the comfortable bench seats, the bathrooms and air conditioning. Take comfort in knowing that you're in a space that may be more professional than a lot of places you may eventually work at for a while. Enjoy having mentorship. Because once you don't... there's not someone there to say, "This is what you did wrong in this audition." You have to figure that out for yourself. Similarly, when you're in college the work is about your growth. In the professional world you're not supposed to need a ton of help, you're fulfilling a service for a company, fulfilling a contract with a group of artists. It's not about process so much anymore. Enjoy college as much as you can. Take as much as you can. Get your

money's worth. Learn everything you can. Ask the questions. Borrow the scripts. Talk to people. You might not know it yet, but you are surrounded by this community of people that truly want the most for you and are like-minded and want you to grow. And be willing to learn about things that aren't just for you. I've never regretted taking a stage management class. It allows me to communicate with stage managers better now and they have respect for me because I know their language. More than anything, learn how to learn.

To read the entire interview, click [here](#).

**Note:** Since the time of the interview much has changed in our world. Erika was kind to note in a recent communication: "Yes, how much things have changed in our world since then. No new projects or anything for me, everything is on hold indefinitely. Just trying to stay healthy and sane."

# ALUMNI PROFILE: MICHAELA NELSON



Michaela Nelson

by Jenn Sheshko Wood

When Michaela Nelson was a Design & Production student at UNI, she explored many of the available facets of theatre on campus. Along with a Music minor, Michaela pursued experiences in Stage Management, Electrics and Costumes.

Through working with UNISTA, completing Practicum assignments, and working in the Costume Studio and for the Stagecraft: Costumes classes, she developed strong skills in management, teaching and technology.

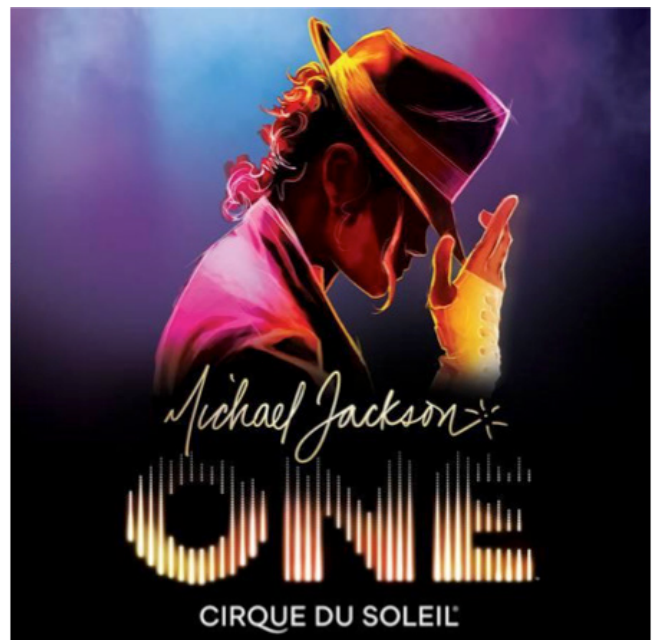
While at UNI, Michaela valued the variety of theatrical opportunities and connections made between course and production work. She was able to diversify and work both onstage and off, as a performer, stitcher, master electrician, stage manager, assistant costume studio manager, and draper. Through her summer stock experiences, she added wardrobe supervisor and crafts artisan to her résumé, all of which connected to her UNI experience and prepared her to enter the entertainment industry.

Upon graduating in 2013, Michaela moved to the Chicago area and stitched at the Paramount Theatre in Aurora. The next year, she worked in Minneapolis

before being hired for her first FELD Entertainment Marvel Tour as a wardrobe technician. In her final years at UNI, Michaela had balanced working electrics with costuming, and this unique blend of skills was perfect for the position of Wardrobe Electrician. For three years, Michaela toured internationally with FELD, maintaining all of the LED costumes for the Superheroes and Villains.

Eager to pursue theatre that would let her put down roots again, Michaela moved to Las Vegas in 2017 and shortly afterwards, joined *MJ ONE* as a Wardrobe Electrician. She also works as on-call wardrobe crew and in these positions she works dresser tracks, daytime maintenance, as well as repairs, and really appreciates the difference between tour life and a long-install like a Cirque Vegas show.

Even though COVID has paused her theatre work in Vegas for the moment, Michaela has been balancing her wardrobing with teaching workshops and commercial stitching. She is staying busy, enjoying getting back to creating and is excited to see what opportunities she will encounter next. Follow her creative Instagram [@Solder\\_and\\_Stitches](#) for some samples of her work!







Tori Rezek

Tori Rezek has had quite a ride since she graduated from UNI in 2012. Tori spent a great deal of her time at UNI in the Costume Studio in the lower levels of Strayer-Wood Theatre where she was a stitcher, a technical assistant and an assistant design collaborator. In her senior semester, Tori was the Costume Designer for the TheatreUNI production of *Dying City*, by Richard Shinn, directed by Richard Glockner (now retired) in the Bertha Martin Theatre.

She was also a student designer for a piece produced by the UNI Student Theatre Association (UNISTA), and joined forces with the UNI Tuba Group and Sissy's Circus, a local fundraising drag show that began while she was a student and has since continued in the Cedar Valley. I got to chat with Tori in the spring of 2020, just before our lives were turned upside down by the pandemic. Her life had been pretty amazing at the time.

After graduation, Tori built costumes for several companies, including the Pacific Conservatory of Performing Arts in California. She also planned corporate and social events in Des Moines, which perhaps began her involvement in looking at 'larger scale' events as a career path. She returned to graduate school in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Her work journey took her to Theatre Aspen, a small non-profit theatre company. She tells me this was an experience that changed her perspective and her career direction. At Theatre Aspen, she saw a collaborative work environment of give and take, of sharing responsibilities and enhancing the creative lives of everyone involved. This sparked a keen interest in doing theatre in a new way, and let Tori pursue that type of administrative and producing work. Tori had an opportunity to work as administrative assistant to Theatre Aspen's Artistic Director in 2016, where she worked with strong female mentors. This preceded her return to school at the University of Cincinnati, where she completed both an MA and MBA in

Arts Administration and Management. During her years there she interned at the Cincinnati Symphony, Cincinnati Playhouse and *Manifest* Creative Research Gallery & Drawing Center.

Tori returned to work at Theatre Aspen for a few years. She oversaw marketing, fundraising and event planning for the popular summer company. Tori had recently accepted her current position as Development Manager at the St. Louis Shakespeare Festival.

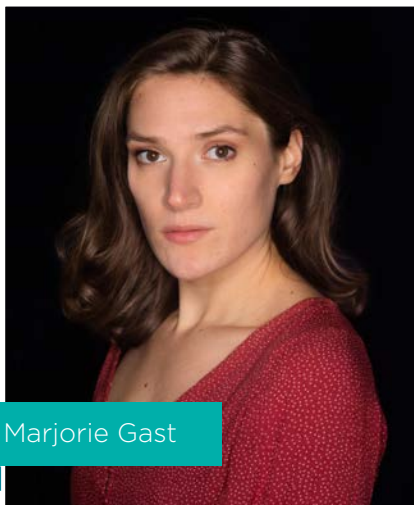
When asked about significant memories or relationships forged at UNI, Tori was very quick to highlight Sissy's Circus. This energetic burlesque show raises funds for Cedar Valley charities, such as House of Hope. A good-sized group of "misfits" create a show annually with bodacious themes and performances. Tori commented that she loved designing for drag; this was a great opportunity for outrageous and fun costume challenges.

As Development Manager for the St. Louis Shakespeare Festival, Tori says she wears "many hats." This position has offered her opportunities to continue taking on challenges of cultivating audiences and programming, finding new ways to bring productions to St. Louis, and introduce theatre to the community around her. The Festival is currently developing stories of the people in their neighborhood and presenting them in *Shakespeare in the Street: the Ville*. This project was delayed from last spring due to pandemic concerns. They are currently collecting memories of their home and hopes for the future, submitted via mail, to be written by local writer Mariah Richardson, and presented in a virtual format. As they continue to respond to outside forces, the Festival will evolve and continue their work, as all theatre companies are currently doing to respond with art and creativity for the benefit of the community they serve.

CLASS OF 2012,  
DESIGN AND  
PRODUCTION EMPHASIS  
—  
CURRENTLY AT ST. LOUIS  
SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

by Amy Rohrberg

# ALUMNI PROFILE: MARJORIE GAST



Marjorie Gast

INTERVIEW EXCERPT,  
OCTOBER 2020

Marjorie Gast is an actor, singer and harpist, newly based in Chicago. She has performed with several theatres around the country from the Mississippi Bend Players in Rock Island, Illinois, all the way to the B Street Theatre in Sacramento, California. She is a Theatre Performance graduate from the University of Northern Iowa.

**Steve Taft:** First of all, how are you doing?

**Marjorie Gast:** That's kind of a loaded question, just because life is so unpredictable right now, not only as a human but also as an artist. Something I've been learning is that feeling of "I don't have an exact plan or path," but we kind of always have been in that — this kind of always have been in that — this kind of prevalent and apparent right now, and that's a little bit eye-opening, a little bit daunting, and a little bit comforting at the same time.

**ST:** Obviously the pandemic has affected not only your career, but thousands of actors in the U.S. and around the world since theatres shut down. What have you done to continue staying sharp regarding your many talents and staying positive?

**MG:** For the first month or so, I was living in California as I was completing my internship (at the B Street Theatre in Sacramento) and I was kind of devastated because I didn't quite know how to proceed doing art or doing things that would allow me to think about my future because it was like, "What is the future? I don't know." But after that point, I just started reading plays. I was reading a play-a-week which was really great, because who shouldn't want to read a play-a-week? I was finding monologues not only for me, but also for friends. I moved back to Cedar Falls and in with my parents once again. I was also doing a lot of researching and going through all of my notebooks and notes from UNI. I was going over stuff I had written as a freshman, sophomore, junior and senior and I just kind of discovered how I've matured and the way I approach roles. So, it's been less of me working on material and on my acting, and more of me

settling into "Wow, I've grown, this is the way I've shifted, and I didn't even know I shifted."

**ST:** It's my understanding that you've been developing an expertise in yoga and teaching it online. How might such an experience be a valuable undertaking for an actor during this time?

**MG:** I think it's valuable not only for artists, but human beings in general to have resources to cope. I'm currently a 200hr Certified Yoga Instructor with a specialization in Trauma. During this downtime I've been able to pursue further training because of Yoga Alliance. It's kind of like the Actor's Equity of yoga. Fortunately, they are allowing online training, and because of the pandemic the Alliance is allowing online contact hours. That's allowing me to complete my training very soon. I will have completed my 500 hours over the last nearly three years. It's like getting a Master's Degree in teaching yoga. I've taken a ton of classes since last April, which I wouldn't have been able to do if things had been different.

But, back to your question. People don't breathe — and too often don't breathe on stage — and one of the most important things (as Stanislavsky says) is concentration and relaxation. Yoga promotes those two things over anything else. So, if you can be concentrated and relaxed why not do yoga to bolster that? And as an actor, as an artist, why wouldn't you?

**ST:** And of course if the actor is focused and relaxed there's a good chance they'll also be listening.

**MG:** Yes, it's stimulating that parasympathetic nervous system, that place where you can be restful and where all of your body functions don't have to think about doing their job. So, if the actor can get to that place where they are relaxed and everything is working in harmony with each other, then you are able to say, "This person is standing in front of me, what are they giving to me as an actor, and how am I going to respond to that?" There's so much more openness and empathy I think.

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# ALUMNI PROFILE: MARJORIE GAST

**ST:** Setting the pandemic aside, taking that big step to pursue an acting career is sometimes a big challenge for a new graduate. How did you prepare to take that step while in college, and what has been your process to building a career?

**MG:** My senior year my big focus was to look at the tools I had gained over the first three years of my training and continue to refine those tools during my senior year. But now that I have those foundational tools, how do they apply not only to where I am at as an actor, but also as a person, and what tools work for me specifically? It was definitely figuring out at that moment what I wanted to have in my tool belt.

And another huge thing was creating a giant spreadsheet — physically making a spreadsheet on my wall, I had it all the way down my door actually. Over the course of three or four different months I wrote down all the auditions I wanted to go to, all the big cattle calls. I wasn't able to attend all of them because I was still in school, but I made that list (in a journal as well) of all the requirements for each audition, down to how you slate at each one specifically. I would Google Image the place I was going to audition and what the auditorium would look like, because it's going to be different if I'm singing this little intimate song in this giant huge theatre. Maybe that's not the song I should sing for this audition. So, I got to personalize my actor package. I don't know why I did all this stuff, probably because I'm a bit of a "Type A" personality. But also, I believe that if you are fully prepared you can face whatever unexpected stuff comes your way with more grace and less stress.

**ST:** Now, you auditioned for summer stock pretty much from the beginning, right?

**MG:** Yes. I started my freshman year and continued through my senior year. At each one I learned something more. My first one I was like, "I have my monologue, I have my song memorized, I know what outfit I'm wearing. I'm feeling good." And it was a very different experience. It was like, "Oh, I learned that you need to rehearse how you talk to your pianist." You learn

all these little things. You basically have to do it once and then go and do it the next year and then take that information and do it the next year, because by the last year I didn't even have to think about it. "This is who I am, this is my package. I don't really care if you like me or not because I feel strong in what I'm doing." So that changed and it was really empowering.

**ST:** Do you have specific auditions you would recommend to students?

**MG:** They were all very different. I think TCUTA's in the Twin Cities is a little different because they've been including a group improv session. That audition seems to be very relaxed, but still very professional. Just less cutthroat than SETC. Perhaps that's because there's less people, it's more intimate and less busy. It's a good one for the heart.

**ST:** That's the audition we often recommend for the student just starting out in regards to auditioning for summer opportunities.

**MG:** I would agree. It was a welcoming environment. Midwest (MATC) is kind of like the big brother of the Twin Cities Auditions. It's run kind of the same way. Except the dance auditions are like, "you want to be a dancer." Now, if you're an actor that moves well and can learn dance moves don't feel bad about that. At that point it's like, "I know I can hit these six marks in the song. I know I can stay focused, and I know I can tell a story with my body." As long as they can see that they will think, "OK, this person tries. Maybe they won't be our lead dancer, but maybe they'll be our lead singer, or maybe they can play a non-singing role," whatever. I would recommend having an open mind in regards to dance auditions at Midwest.

They are also very, very specific on time, so you will get cut off. I was never cut off, I was always under time. Always. I don't think people were cut off at Twin Cities, but Midwest, SETC and UPTA's, definitely. SETC and UPTA's are basically the same. A huge number of actors. It's really exhilarating when you feel you did a good job. You have to wait in line for what feels

like an eternity for your 90 seconds. You drive nine hours to get there, you're so tired and are thinking, "I have an exam in 48 hours." But, you pull out your strong suit and do it. Fortunately, I got 14 callbacks in my last round at SETC, and I'm not kidding you, I was sweating running from room to room to room in combination of the convention center and the hotel. You have your five minutes, and it's on to the next one. Just be prepared because it's going to feel crazy, but there's not one person there that doesn't feel crazy.

**ST:** Has there ever been a time when another actor in your group did a monologue you had selected?

**MG:** I personally had not had a repeat monologue or song. A big thing I try to do is to pick things that are not going to be done. I don't want to be that person where another follows up and does it slightly different and someone else says, "I like that better." Not that they were better, but in that moment that person thought it was more interesting the way the other person did it. But, the amount of times people do the "Tuna Fish" monologue (from *Laughing Wild*), people need to stop doing it. Or *Thoroughly Modern Millie*. Just stop it, because you want to be fresh and unique as you only have around 90 seconds to make an impression.

**ST:** And of course the way young actors can avoid such duplication is to read plays, become familiar with the history of American musical theatre and the wonderful array of music that is available.

**MG:** Yes. Over the past three months I've been working with three different high school students over Zoom. I directed them while I was in college so I've seen them develop over the years and now they're ready to go to college. So, I've been working with them and first of all you learn so much by just speaking out loud a process of acting. In my heart I knew all these things, and I've shared them with some people, and when I've directed I've shared them, but when you're one-on-one with a student for the first time you're getting to explain what "actions" are and what the "given

(continued)

# ALUMNI PROFILE: MARJORIE GAST

circumstances” of a play are. It makes me feel special and honored to be in that moment. I remember my first experience and being like, “actions” it makes so much sense. So, my big thing is read plays. I keep giving them plays each week. Read plays you don’t know. Read plays that have characters you can’t be cast in. Don’t read plays just because you think you can find a monologue for yourself. It’s like reading a book or a novel, but so much shorter and easier. I also tell them to read the play all the way through in one sitting so they can begin forming thoughts on how they think it might end. When we watch a play, it’s Act 1 and Act 2 and then it’s done. We don’t watch Act 1 and then a day later it’s Act 2. Know what you like. At B Street Theatre I got to play characters that I couldn’t relate to, but I’m a professional and that’s my job. But, when you’re 18, 19 and auditioning, you primarily need to choose material that you like so you can do a strong audition.

**ST:** Speaking of material, how many monologues and/or songs do you have in your audition repertoire?

**MG:** (Laughter as Marjorie holds up a three-ring binder full of material.) This contains all of the monologues that I always bring with me. It’s all the ones I’ve found myself, and all the ones I’ve done in shows. Now, most of these I can pull out of thin air and be ready to go, some I may have to rework. But, if I look one over for ten minutes I can pretty much do it. And when you have a lot of callbacks, you want this (binder) because every one of those callbacks may want something different. Some companies may hold an interview. Some may want to see a comedic monologue. Some want to hear you “belt.” Some may want to hear how high you can sing. So, you have to have a little bit of everything. Luckily when you sign up for your callback time, there may be a note that says specifically what they want to see (a contemporary monologue for example). Having a contrasting piece is important as well as a classical piece, most

likely Shakespeare because that’s what they mostly ask for if they’re going to be doing a classical show.

**ST:** As you read the many plays that you do, do you come across a character in which you say to yourself, “I perhaps won’t play this character today, but in ten or fifteen years I’ll be perfect.” And do you save that for the future?

**MG:** More often than not, yes. And as I tell my students, going back from high school to senior year in college, I have acting journals and I can look back and see a monologue I did for a class or for a show or if it’s improv, you can recall such things if you have a journal. So, I have a journal right over there that may say, “I’m not 35 or 40, but I will be someday.” Like *Mary Page Marlowe* by Tracy Letts. I want to do that show so bad, but I’m not the age of her right now.

**ST:** I imagine you discover favorite playwrights as well.

**MG:** One of the playwrights I love right now is Sarah Treem. She’s very cool. And Julia Specht. Julia wrote this play called *Overpass* and I can’t get over how amazing it is. I’ve read it through four times. I have both character monologues in my back pocket and I love her plays. It’s on New Play Exchange.

**ST:** You’ve been recording some video monologues. Are they for a specific audition or theatre?

**MG:** Chicago Shakespeare Theater was recently accepting monologue auditions for whenever they open again. It was really interesting because I’ve been doing a lot of research (because what else can we do, but research), on what kind of auditions theatres are asking for these days. I bypass all the Zoom plays/theaters for now and go straight to live theatre. And it’s like, “When we open up we’re going to be doing

these plays so we’re taking these virtual submissions now.” They seem to be a lot less strict. It’s really interesting.

**ST:** As we wrap up, what advice do you have for students while they’re here at UNI?

**MG:** Soak in as much as you can. Don’t put so much pressure on yourself. It was a time for me to discover who I was because you can’t really dive into another person, another human being, another character if you don’t address how you exist in the world. That doesn’t mean you have to go really deep into your past, it’s just “How do I need to breathe?” “What’s my system of memorization?” “Whose teaching do I relate to the most? Is it like, Meisner or Chekov?” Or maybe it doesn’t have to do anything with theatre? Maybe it’s a yoga instructor. Whatever it is, find that thing that makes you feel really grounded and who you are so that you have empathy and are open to another person you are portraying.

**ST:** Thank you for spending time with me today and sharing your experiences and advice for those students pursuing similar dreams and aspirations.



# ALUMNI PROFILE: MELIA BESCHTA



Melia Beschta

by Jenn Sheshko Wood

Alumni Melia Beschta graduated from UNI in 2015 and has been working in stage management in the years since.

At UNI, Melia was in the Design & Production emphasis, focusing her production assignments and elective coursework on stage management and electrics.

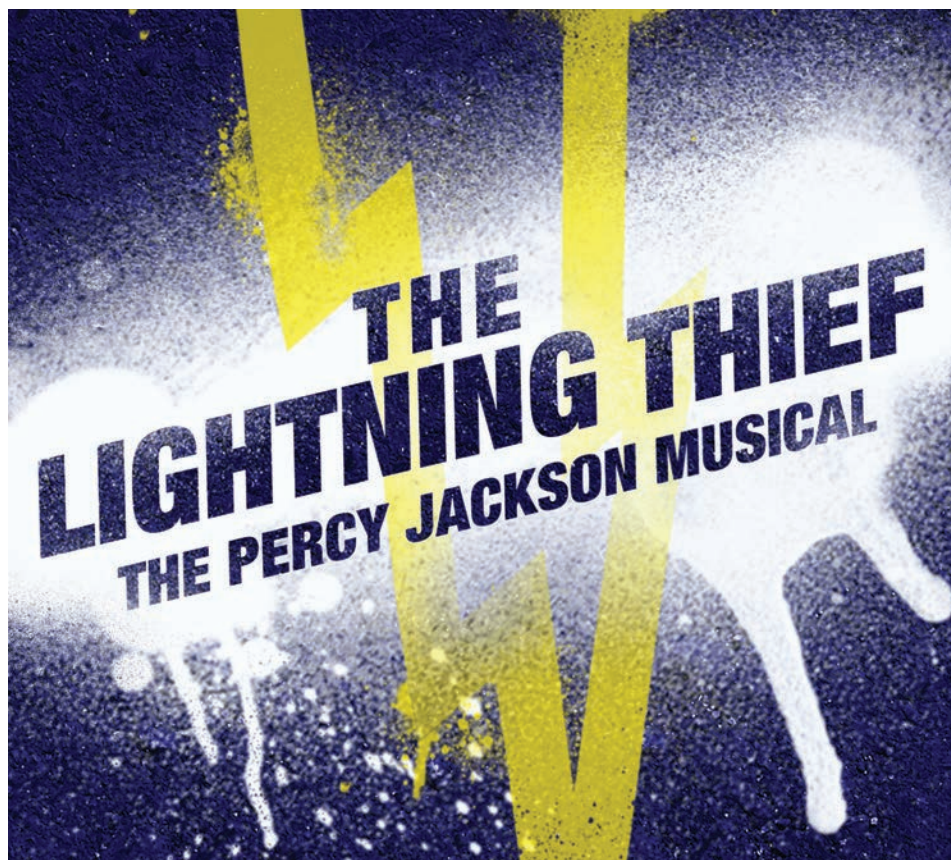
After spending two summer seasons at the Trinity Shakespeare Festival, Melia moved to Fort Worth Texas and freelanced for the Lyric Stage and Amphibian Stage Productions. In 2017, Melia visited New York and after shadowing the stage manager on the off-Broadway production of *The Lightning Thief*, she moved to New York and later joined the production's first national tour in 2018. Melia began as a PA and became a substitute ASM, earning her Equity card in the process. When the production moved to Broadway, she continued on as the substitute ASM.

Melia credits the personal attention from TheatreUNI's professors for preparing

her to work in the industry, and to meet each challenge as an opportunity. While at school, she was proactive in seeking out information and opportunities, and appreciated the breadth of coursework to refine her skills.

In New York, Melia spends her time working for the Julliard School's stage operations department. These days, the city feels more subdued than usual and plans are on hold as the country reacts to COVID-19. But she is hopeful for what the future holds. This fall, she will start work on a television series! Her experience as a stage manager caught the attention of colleagues in that industry and she is excited to translate her skills to a new environment.

While theatre and stage management are Melia's passion, she has always been interested in continuing her family tradition of service and hopes to one day open a coffee shop inspired by her experiences in theatre.



# STURGIS YOUTH THEATRE



## CURTAIN RISES ON 20 YEARS OF SUCCESS FOR STURGIS YOUTH THEATRE

By Melody Parker with additional content by Gretta Berghammer, photo by Kelly Wenzel

CEDAR FALLS — When Gretta Berghammer followed her vision and started Sturgis Youth Theatre in 1999, statistics showed the theatre could succeed if she could keep it going for five years.

On Thursday, July 17, 2019, the curtain rose on 20 years of success as Sturgis Youth Theatre presented *Snow White*.

The show, like every Sturgis Youth Theatre production since Summer 2000, was completely produced and performed by youths ages 4 to 18 working on stage and behind the scenes creating scenery, props and costumes. There are never any auditions; students register to participate in the annual summer program which typically serves 50-60 young people.

When Gretta founded the theatre, her initial adventure began as a collaboration between UNI's theatre department, the Hearst Center for the Arts and the Oster Regent Theatre, where the Sturgis Youth Theatre made its home for the first four years. Now it is based at UNI's Strayer-Wood Theatre and is a component of TheatreUNI.

The first production was *Old Silent Movie*, a madcap comedy that told the story of a silent movie film project gone terribly wrong. The production featured about 25

kids, including future UNI theatre major and current Broadway actor Sam Lilja!

"That first summer it was a 'money-in-the-shoebox' kind of show, and we handed out tickets from a roll like you'd get for a carnival ride," recalled Berghammer.

But the founder and artistic director had succeeded in creating "a point of entry" into a safe and supportive environment where children could learn, have fun, make friends and build their skills while exploring opportunities in theatre.

From the beginning, Berghammer made a commitment to inclusiveness.

Approximately 20 percent of the program's participants are identified as having an exceptionality, such as autism. Of all of the work that the SYT has achieved over the past 20 years, it is this aspect of the program that makes Berghammer most proud.

There continue to be several paid staff as well as interns, SYT alumni who return as summer volunteers and UNI theatre students and faculty members, including scenic designer Mark A. Parrott and costume designer Katrina Sandvik.

For more than 15 years, Jascenna Haislet

served as the Production Manager. In addition to Sam Lilja, the theatre helped jumpstart careers for such UNI alumni as Matt Vichlach and Dylan Martin.

Numerous program alums have gone on to study theatre.

Berghammer credits parents, sponsors and the community for the theatre's longevity and accomplishments. "It's been fabulous. People were 'all in' from the beginning. What touches me most is that parents of kids who left the program long ago still support us and continue to come to the shows. That says a lot about the role theatre has played in that child's life."

In the future, Berghammer plans to explore more experimental youth theatre productions and Shakespeare. "I want this program to keep going. It can't end when I retire. I want Sturgis Youth Theatre to be a benchmark for excellence that continues and thrives."

—  
Photo from left, Ethan Jacobsen, 10, Jada Zars, 10, Paige Wilson, 11, and Cale Clark, 10, are among young actors playing multiple roles in the Sturgis Youth Theatre production of "Snow White."



# GUEST ARTIST PROFILE: CHRIS WOOD

By Jennifer Sheshko Wood

In recent years, we have been fortunate to have a number of guest artists visit our department, both for workshops and as members of the artistic team on our mainstage productions.

Lighting designer Chris Wood has joined our department four times in recent years, designing lights for *Spring Awakening* (2013), *Rent* (2015), and *Cabaret* (2019) on our Strayer-Wood stage, and *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* (2018) presented at the Gallagher Bluedorn.

Originally from Omaha, NE, Chris earned his MFA from Indiana University in 2011 and won the USITT & LDI/Live Design Rising Star Award in 2015. Chris has been in the theatre industry since 1999, working rock concerts and tours, and designing industrials, musicals and operas. He has maintained a steady career both as

a designer and as a professor. Since 2011, he has taught lighting and sound design at Millikin University, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and at the University of Nebraska Omaha.

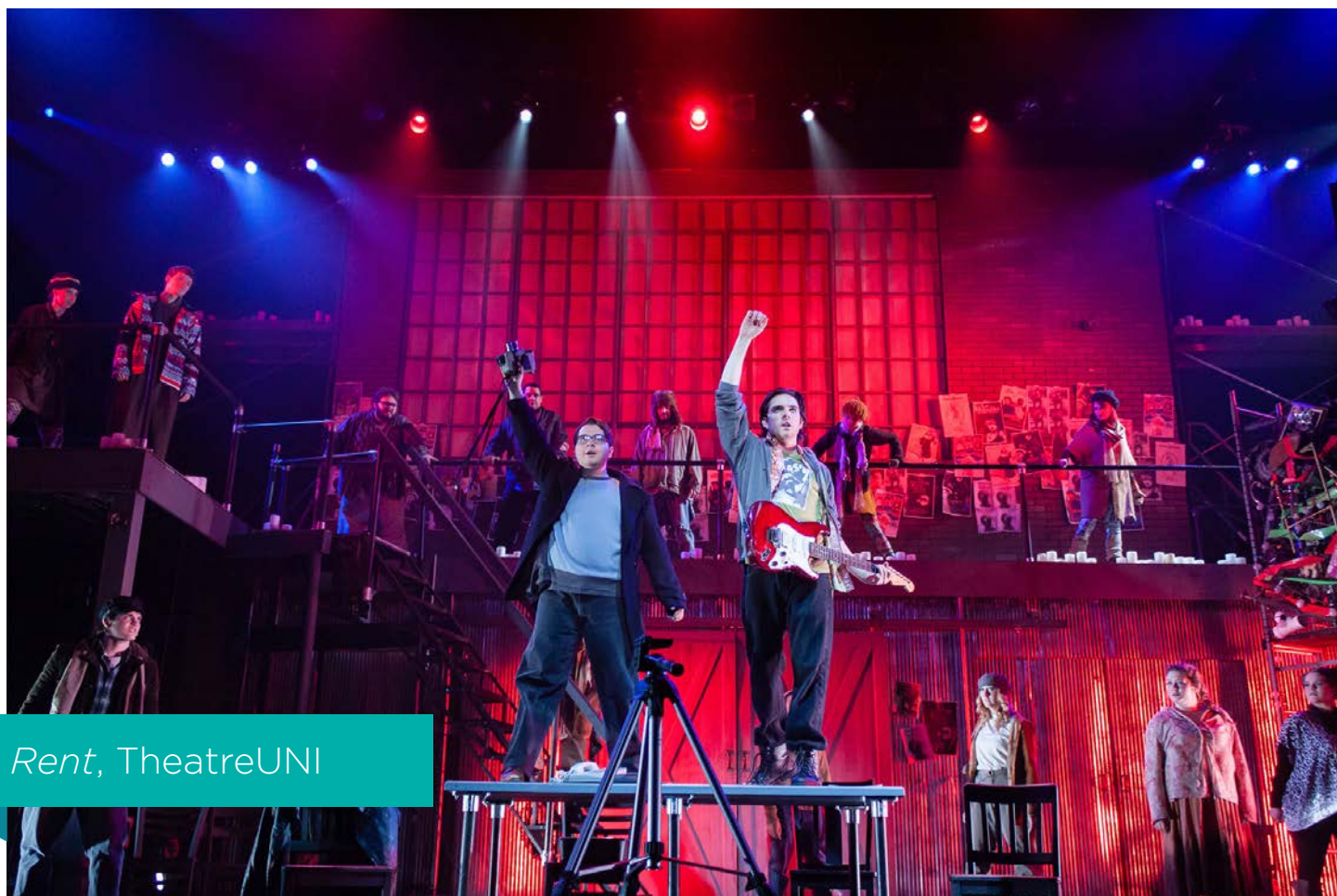
As a designer, Chris has focused on new works, musicals and operas, designing nationally at a variety of venues. He is the resident designer at the Utah Festival Opera & Musical Theatre (UFOMT), and has recently designed at Oregon Cabaret Theatre, Bloomington Playwrights Project and Omaha Community Playhouse.

At UNI, Chris always brings something innovative and interesting to the production. Often working with RC4 Wireless, Chris has negotiated innovative technologies to introduce to our students. In *Spring Awakening*, working with Mark Parrott and Shawn Poellet, Chris integrated over 2000 LEDs into the silhouette of the scenic design. On *Rent*, we used RC4's new

Pixel Driver for Angel's Christmas Eve dress, pioneering the programming for that module. Elation Lighting also donated instruments to that production that were used to dynamic effect, even ending up in advertisements for that company (see *Rent* photo below).

Beyond our stages, Chris' connection with our department has also opened up summer stock opportunities for TheatreUNI students, as in recent years they have gained lighting positions at UFOMT and beyond. As a designer, Chris enjoys mentoring students as they enter the professional world and he is invested in how they grow.

Website: [www.chriswoodld.com](http://www.chriswoodld.com)





# THEATRE UNI'S MULTICULTURAL THEATRICAL SOCIETY

TheatreUNI's Multicultural Theatrical Society (MTS) is a new club for students of all multicultural backgrounds and student allies. Founded and advised by Assistant Professor Jim Bray, the purpose of this new organization is to utilize theatre to provide a voice to the marginalized global majority and multicultural student performers and technicians while fostering an inclusive environment.

Bray states, "The mission of MTS is to represent our ever-changing society utilizing theater as outreach. Theater is an art form that asks us to accurately represent those who are underrepresented by holding a mirror to society through performance."

MTS was official as recently as September 2019 and has already gained recognition throughout campus. Our student officers have been invited to participate with other organizations as well as perform material at a variety of campus events. In the 2020/2021 school year, the Multicultural Theatrical Society will continue performing staged readings of diverse and inclusive plays while aiding in the production of student produced, directed and designed works involving inclusion and diversity.

Next year we already have some exciting things in the works including our annual Latinx Heritage celebration, Black History Month performances, as well as LGBTQ theatre recognizing Word AIDS Day (in collaboration with Broadway Cares Equity Fights AIDS) and our new event "Mental Health Awareness Rocks!". To stay up to date, find us on our Facebook page: [UNI Multicultural Theatrical Society](#).

Our 2019/2020 inaugural officers for MTS were as follows: Abigail Chagolla-President, Tatiana Sandoval-Vice President, Devin Yarkosky-Secretary, Caroline Henry and Ray Nelson-Co-Treasurers and Zoella Sneed-Publicity/Marketing Director.

Current 2020/21 Officers are: Tatiana Sandoval-President, Bre Eigenheer-Vice President, Devin Yarkosky-Secretary, Caroline Henry and Ray Nelson-Co-Treasurers and Zoella Sneed-Publicity/Marketing Director.



**TATIANA SANDOVAL**  
President



**BRE EIGENHEER**  
Vice President



**DEVIN YARKOSKY**  
Secretary



*university of northern iowa*  
**MULTICULTURAL**  
*Theatrical*  
**SOCIETY**



**Publicity**  
**ZOELLA SNEED**



**Co-Treasurer**  
**CAROLINE HENRY**



**Co-Treasurer**  
**RAY NELSON**





# MEET THE MONSTERS

In Fall 2018, TheatreUNI produced Qui Nguyen's *She Kills Monsters*, a touching story about coming to terms and healing. The story takes place in both reality and a Dungeons and Dragons roleplaying scenario.

In support of this production, we offered an advanced stagecraft class focused on puppet construction. The class created three larger-than-life bugbear puppets, each requiring three people to operate, and a Beholder with light-up eye stalks and a blinking eyelid. Mark Parrott, the scenic designer, also created a crawling claw and designed five spectacular articulated dragon heads. We collaborated with the art department to laser cut each of the thousands of pieces needed to build the dragon heads and Katrina Sandvik poured countless hours into putting it all together and working with Mark to fill in the details. The costume shop also lent its support in creature creation making Kobolds and a Mindflyer using a variety of both found and purchased materials.

We wanted to share the work and dedication that went into all of these creatures, who may only appear on stage for a few moments during the show, so we decided to host an event to let the public "meet the monsters." As luck would have it, our production was scheduled to go into tech just before Thanksgiving so we were able to tie our event to Halloween.

We invited the public into the Bertha Martin Theatre to see the monsters in all states of progress. The students and designers were present to answer questions and provide additional information about the design and build processes. After they had a chance to check out the monsters and nibble on some monster cookies we invited everyone into the Strayer-Wood space for a full design presentation. The event was a smashing success and we are looking forward to more opportunities to include our audiences in interesting elements of our production process.



# EXCITING NEW PARTNERSHIP FOR DRAMA/THEATRE FOR YOUTH STUDENTS



Patrick Elkins-Zeglarski

By Gretta Berghammer

My first introduction to Patrick Elkins-Zeglarski was a letter (yes, a letter...this was long before we did everything by email) of inquiry about the theatre degree program at UNI.

There were two reasons why this letter caught my attention: first, the letter was decorated with an assortment of hand-drawn balloons in a variety of colors. Secondly, the sender was from California. Why on earth was anyone from California looking at a theatre program in the heart of the Midwest?

My response, and the exchange of letters and phone calls which followed, eventually brought Patrick Elkins-Zeglarski to UNI. During his time with the department, he performed numerous roles and was an active participant in youth theatre courses, productions and programs. Our initial letter exchange, in tandem with his semesters at UNI, evolved into a friendship that has lasted to this very day.

Patrick pursued an MFA in Youth Theatre/Drama Education at Arizona State University. He eventually made his way back to the Bay Area. He established a successful career as a teaching artist and guest director. He frequently returned to UNI to work as both an adjunct instructor (filling in for me!) and as a guest director. His production of *Bat Boy: The Musical* was one of the more memorable shows he directed for TheatreUNI.

Eventually Patrick and his partner, David, relocated to the Denver area. Patrick currently serves as the Education Coordinator for the Denver Center for the Performing Arts. As Patrick grew his programs, he needed more interns to help deliver the range of programs. To fill those needs, he turned to UNI. The result: a formalized partnership that benefits both the DCPA and Drama/Theatre for Youth students at UNI.

Each summer, up to three advanced Drama/Theatre for Youth students are selected to participate. Students spend anywhere from two to ten weeks living in Denver, working daily at the DCPA as associate drama and theatre instructors.

Working in teams with area professionals, the students gain valuable hands on experiences developing, writing and implementing drama based lessons and rehearsal plans. They work with youth of all abilities, ranging in age from four through high school. In addition, students meet weekly with Patrick for lectures on such topics as workshop management, diversifying to meet the needs of all learners and program development.

Both Patrick and the department are hopeful that, over time, internship opportunities for other majors will be added to the partnership.



# 2020 VIRTUAL THEATRE: KATY HAHN

## ALUMNI PERFORMANCES DURING A PANDEMIC

Last spring, Adam Knight sent me the script for the play *Grounded* by George Brant and asked me what I thought of it and whether I would be interested in playing the Pilot. I read the play and was struck immediately by some uncanny parallels between the character and myself. For instance, both of us were women with big dreams whose lives and careers were changed forever by unexpected pregnancies. I could go on and on about the research and rehearsal process for this particular play, but I'll focus on specifically what it was like to perform under the strange and challenging circumstances of the pandemic.

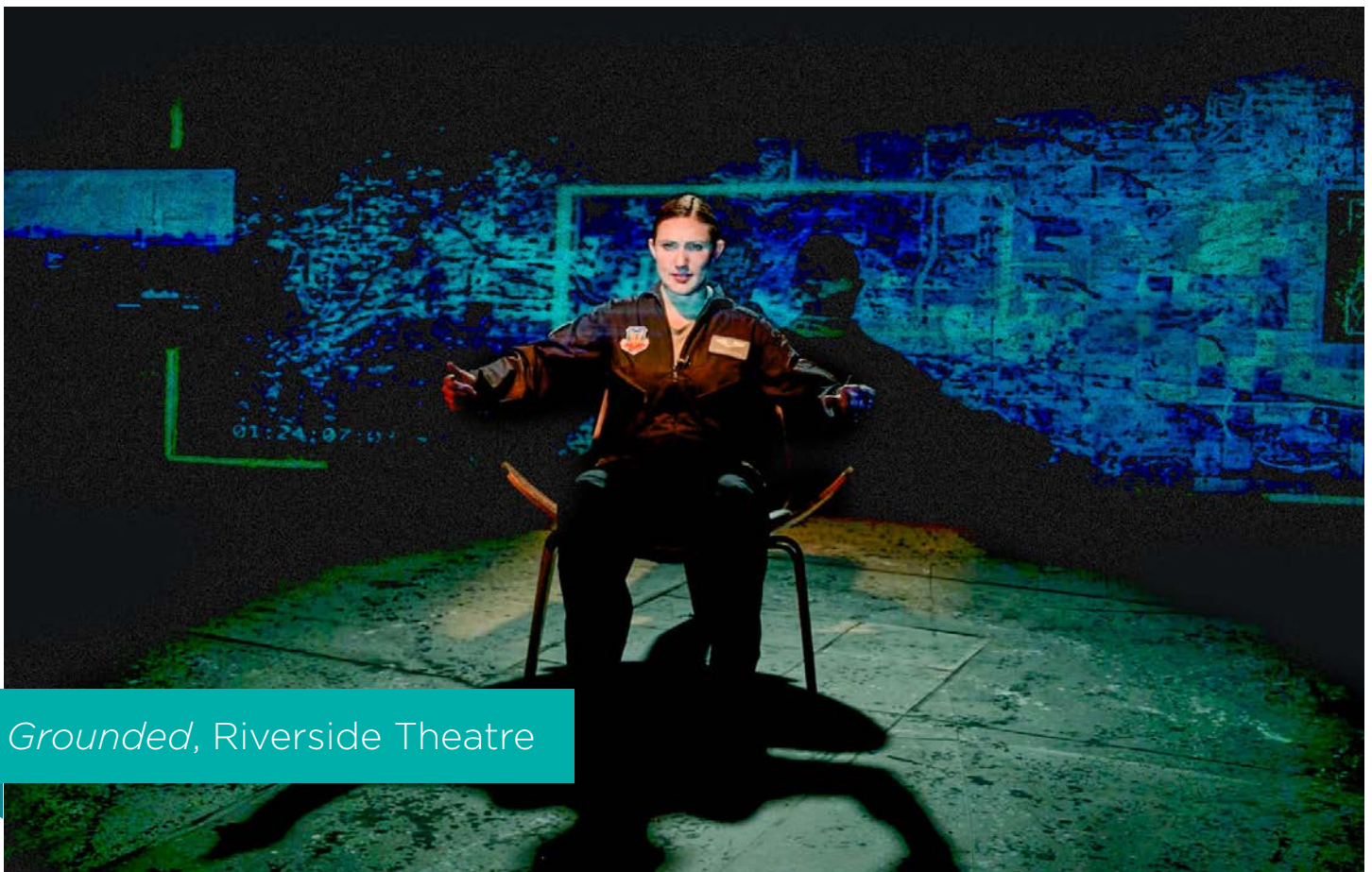
I performed in *Grounded* in the fall of 2020 as part of Riverside Theatre's Virtual Stories Series. Not only had Riverside halted all in-person productions for safety reasons, but due to the rising cost of rent they left their space fairly soon after the pandemic had begun. Riverside pivoted to a season of completely virtual plays that could be streamed on-demand.

*Grounded* was unlike any other show I have done at Riverside for a number of reasons:

- We never actually rehearsed in Iowa City. The director and I met (fully masked!) to rehearse in my basement, at Cornell College, and at the Grandon Studio at Theatre Cedar Rapids, where we eventually filmed the production.
- I got a COVID test before we started filming to make sure it would be safe for me to perform without a mask. There were only a handful of other people in the studio when we filmed, and we were all at least six feet apart. Everyone else wore masks and/or shields while we filmed.
- My least favorite part was having only imaginary scene partners. *Grounded* is a one-actor show, and though we staged and performed it to give the feel of an actor talking to a live audience, I was actually just talking to a black concrete wall. I missed talking to human beings!

- We filmed the first 45 minutes on a Monday and the last 45 minutes on a Tuesday. We stopped and started a few times if I flipped a line or if the timing on a light cue was off, and at the end of each night, we went back and re-filmed some moments to get a few different camera angles. I have acted on stage and on camera, but this process felt like a strange blend of both worlds.

- The coolest part of this endeavor was that people who normally do not get to see my work — my best friend in Colorado, my brothers, my friends from graduate school — were able to watch the play! Theatre is not the same as it was before, but theatre artists are among the most innovative and resilient folks I know, and we are finding new ways to reach our audiences, near and far!



*Grounded*, Riverside Theatre

# 2020 VIRTUAL THEATRE: JESSICA LINK

## ALUMNI PERFORMANCES DURING A PANDEMIC

One of the things I love most about live theatre is breath. Sharing time, space and air with fellow actors and the audience leads to the sacred space for me that is the theatre. Unfortunately, shared air is exactly what must be avoided at this time. However, I have been fortunate enough to be a part of several online professional theatre experiences during this pandemic.

Two of my online performances were for Riverside Theatre in Iowa City. The first was a Shakespearean monologue as part of their “30 Days of Shakespeare” project in April 2020. Having performed with the theatre since 2017, I was part of a group of past Riverside artists approached by Artistic Director Adam Knight to submit a piece. I was again approached by Adam to participate in Riverside’s “Walking the Wire” online festival of original monologues. The piece *No Refunds* was written by Olivia Lilley, Artistic Director of

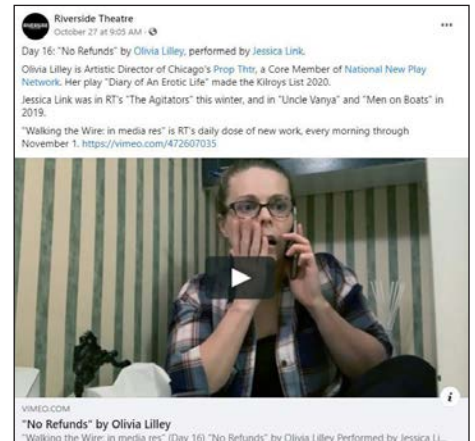
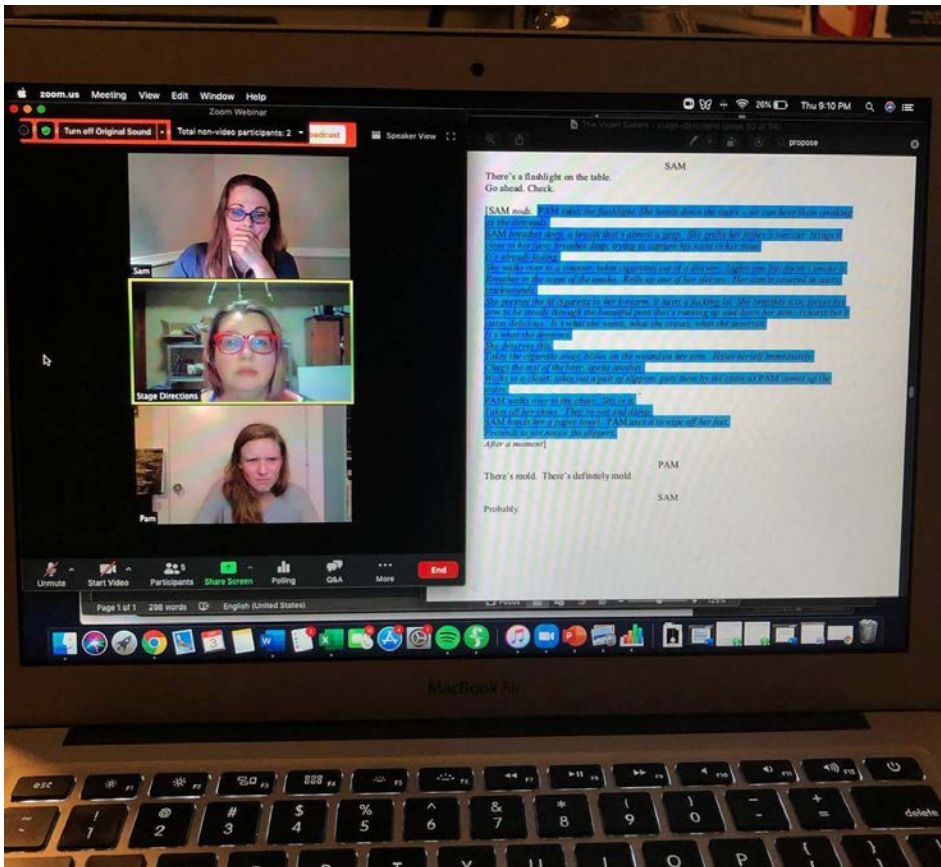
Chicago's Prop Thtr. I had the opportunity to meet virtually with Olivia to discuss her new work before recording the monologue.

In September, I did a reading of *The Violet Sisters* with Cedar Rapids-based Mirrorbox Theatre. Cavan Hallman, Artistic Director, pulled together a group of artists from beyond Iowa including Heather Chrisler, a Chicago-based actor, and Gina Femia, a New York-based playwright. Cavan reached out to me for this opportunity having seen my work at other area theatres.

While I still miss the shared breath of live theatre, these experiences have given me a great opportunity to learn new aspects of the craft. In the Riverside pieces, I experienced both the joy and the challenge of crafting a piece virtually on my own with just the text as my guide. It was a unique opportunity to truly select what the audience could see — from the location it

was filmed in, the actions taking place, the time of day, even the angle of the audience's eye. All of that was crafted at home alone ... or more specifically with the support of my talented husband/director and fellow TheatreUNI alum, Joe Link. That has been another unexpected benefit to performing from home; typically we tag-team projects as we raise our two girls. Finally, the virtual stage has allowed me the chance to collaborate with other professional theatre artists from across the country — moving beyond just those I can share air with to those who I can share the creative journey with via new technologies.

While I look forward to returning to the stage — and to being in the audience — I am thankful for the opportunities I've had during this time to approach the work in a new way and to breathe new life into my creative process.



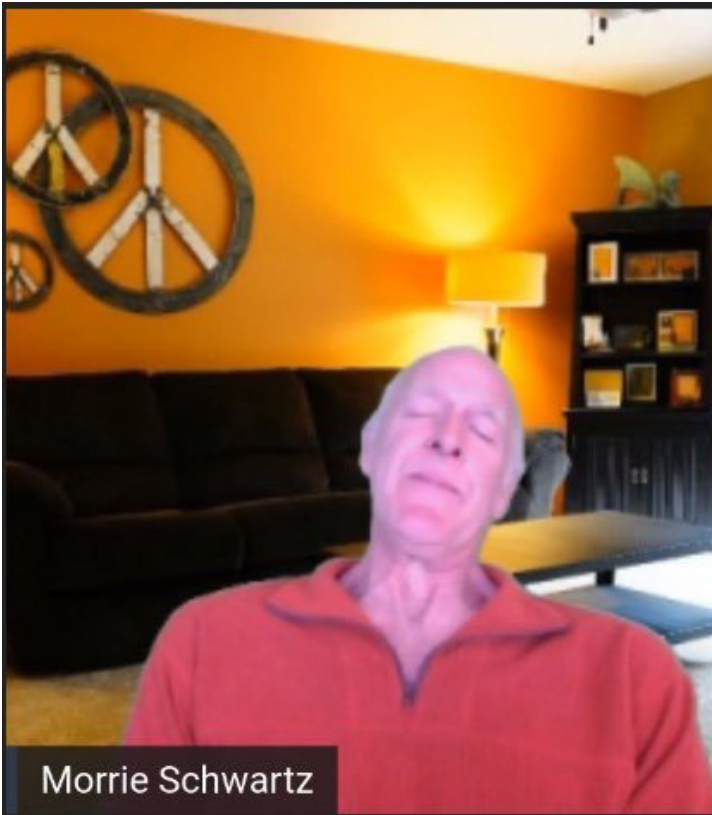
LEFT: *THE VIOLET SISTERS* - CAVAN HALLMAN/MIRRORBOX THEATRE

ABOVE: RIVERSIDE  
THEATRE'S FACEBOOK  
POST

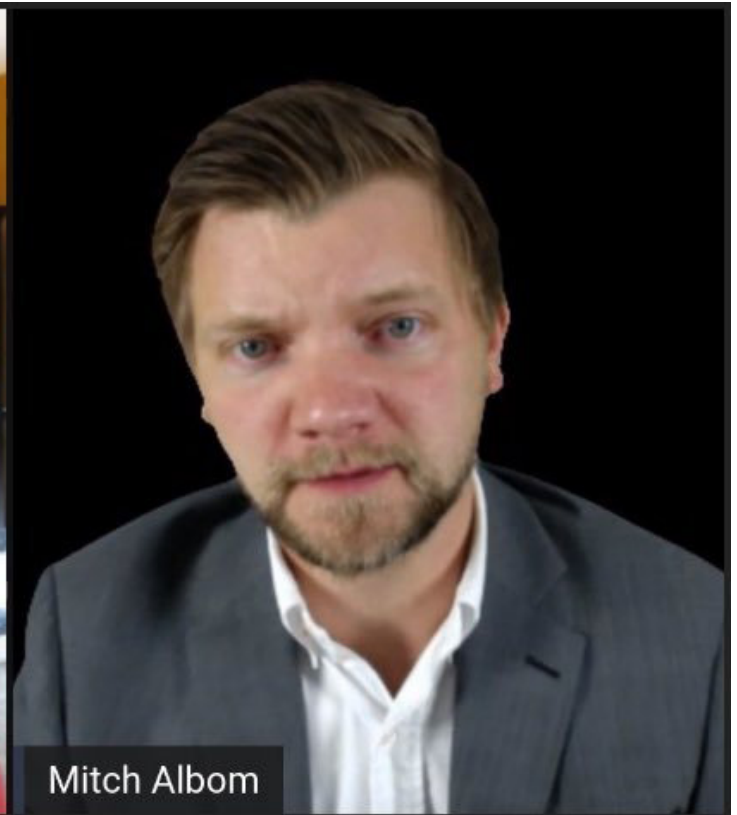


# 2020 VIRTUAL THEATRE: BEN SHERIDAN

## ALUMNI PERFORMANCES DURING A PANDEMIC



Morrie Schwartz



Mitch Albom

Iowa Stage Theatre Company recently produced a virtual production of Mitch Albom's *Tuesdays With Morrie*. The script was chosen in an effort to produce a show that would resonate through the realities of the pandemic. Despite having many reservations about the challenges a virtual production would present (including logistical, financial and artistic), Artistic Director and Director Matt McIver framed an interpretation of the script that was greatly enhanced by our current realities.

The production involved Iowa artists Tom Geraty (Morrie) and myself (Mitch) performing remotely with brought-in lighting, audio and greenscreens. McIver's vision of the production never explicitly mentioned a pandemic. However, by eliminating a few physical interactions within the script, the undercurrent of the pandemic broke through. As an actor, I was initially very disappointed at the thought

of performing such an intimate, tender script virtually. I wasn't convinced that the delicate moments within the script would translate through a screen. My colleague, Tom, described the process as "the hardest thing [he's] done in 36 years of theater." Much to my surprise, Tom and I eventually adjusted to the unique conditions and were able to find tremendous emotional connections.

Audiences responded enthusiastically to the production, saying they could deeply relate to the characters' struggles, which were made all the more profound by current circumstances. While I doubt most scripts would live up to their potential through a virtual production, it was heartwarming to hear how deeply touched audiences were by this one. Like so many others, I eagerly await to be back in the theatre. For now, I am comforted in knowing that theatre can still find creative ways to touch and inspire.

ABOVE: *TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE*, IOWA STAGE THEATRE COMPANY

# 2020 VIRTUAL THEATRE: ANGIE TOOMSEN

## ALUMNI PERFORMANCES DURING A PANDEMIC

As soon as it became clear our planned productions moved from “slightly” to “indefinitely” postponed, we began exploring options to move to virtual offerings. Initially, we moved two of our halted events. First was a new play festival already in the works. We identified directors and held video auditions. Over 80 area volunteers took part in our zoom webinar festival.

Next, we took a production in progress — Thornton Wilder’s *The Skin of Our Teeth* — and adapted it for Zoom. Both events brought a sense of hope and engagement to our volunteers and to a segment of patrons.

As the situation continued, we became more deliberate about our online programming and put together a budget, production plan and marketing strategy for sequential “mini seasons.” These three-month bundles allow us the flexibility to change course should impactful information come to light. Our first mini-season included a multi-performer cabaret with performers recorded separately and edited together. We also commissioned a new work by a beloved playwright and solo performer from Iowa City. Finally, we recorded a solo concert by a local and national cabaret performer.

Our next mini season will include an original holiday variety show written by fellow UNI alum, Joe Link. We will also present a work about cyber bullying written by Jennifer Fawcett, originally commissioned by Hancher Auditorium. And we will conclude with a “Divas: 2021” concert with two well-known

area performers. The third mini season planning is already underway, including two well-respected works by and for persons of color.

We are treating virtual programming like a completely different medium and art form. Fundamental performance and character development values remain, but recording and editing a play or concert is closer to TV or film than live theater. There is the possibility for a new point of view — the cameras — to mine for meaning. It’s exciting and strange. We have added video, audio and art direction to our core team of professional artisans.

Our team and I have worked to use our space in surprising and new ways. And we are presenting original material and some professional performers.

We produced one in-person event this fall, Conor McPherson’s *St. Nicholas*, a solo show with a limited, outdoor, socially distanced audience. The show challenged us to provide an engaging experience out-of-doors with a restricted cast size. We have no plans to invite audiences into our theatre again until safety is certain, so this will be our only in-person event until we can be outside again in the spring.

This has been an intense learning experience and I believe it will change the way we think about our programming even as we move into a post-Covid era. The most important thing is that we keep delivering on our mission as best we can. That being said, live theater can’t return soon enough!



Left: A scene from Conor McPherson’s *Saint Nicholas*

Above top and middle: Amy Stoner concert

Above bottom: From Megan Gogerty’s *Feel Better*

Photos by Farrar Design



In February 2019, Assistant Professor of Directing, Dr. Amy S. Osatinski published *Disney Theatrical Productions: Producing Broadway Musicals The Disney Way*. From the back cover:

*Disney Theatrical Productions: Producing Broadway Musicals the Disney Way* is the first work of scholarship to comprehensively examine the history and production practices of Disney Theatrical Productions (DTP), the theatrical producing arm of the studio branch of the Walt Disney Corporation.

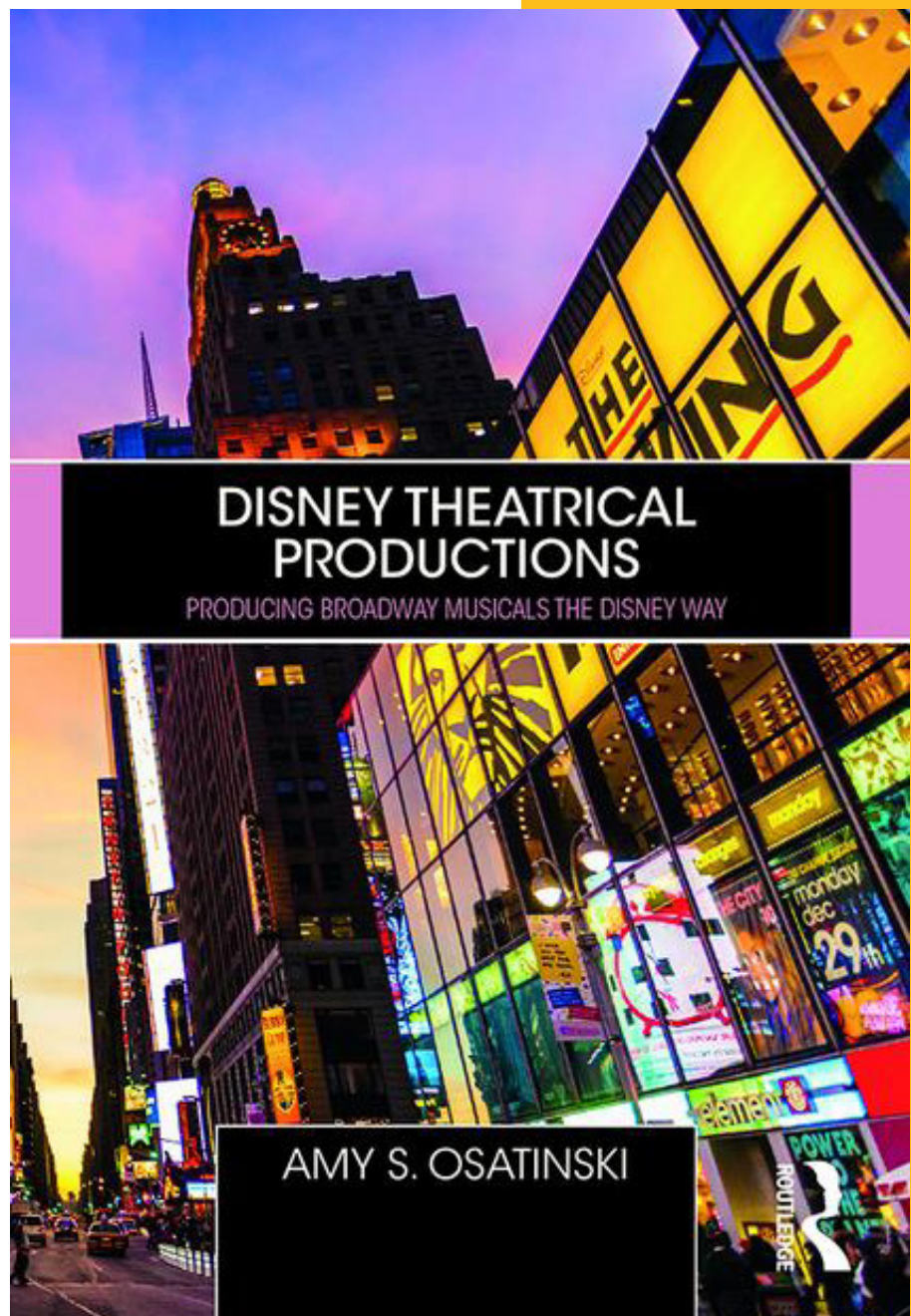
This book uncovers how DTP has forged a new model for producing large-scale musicals on Broadway by functioning as an independent theatrical producer under the umbrella of a large entertainment corporation. Case studies of three productions (*The Lion King*, *Tarzan*, and *Newsies*) demonstrate the flexibility and ingenuity of DTP, and showcase the various production models that the company has employed over the years. Exploring topics such as the history of DTP, its impact on the revitalization of Times Square, and its ability to open up a new audience base for Broadway theatre, this volume examines the impact that DTP has had on Times Square and American musicals, both domestically and internationally, and how its accomplishments have helped reshape the Broadway landscape.

The book has led to exciting opportunities for Dr. Osatinski as an expert in commercial musical theatre, including being interviewed by *Forbes* and appearing on *Notably Disney*, a podcast about Disney music and books. Dr. Osatinski has also presented her research on Disney Theatrical Productions at several major conferences and will be featured as a part of a special group of panels at the Pop Culture Association of America Conference in 2022 on *Newsies*. The panels will cover *Newsies* on stage and screen to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the film and the 10th anniversary of the stage production.

Dr. Osatinski was also recently commissioned to write another book on musical theatre. The text, titled *20 Seasons: Broadway Musicals of the 21st Century*

will explore the 269 musicals that opened on Broadway between October 2000 and March 2020. This book, which will be the first to comprehensively explore this period in Broadway musical history, will catalogue, categorize and analyze these productions in order to paint a picture of the Broadway musical in the 21st Century.

*Disney Theatrical Productions: Producing Broadway Musicals the Disney Way* can be purchased in paperback or hardcover on Amazon or by visiting [disneybroadwaybook.com](http://disneybroadwaybook.com). The book will soon be available as an audiobook. *20 Seasons* will be available from Routledge in late 2022 or early 2023.



# ASSISTANT PROFESSORS JIM BRAY AND DR. AMY OSATINSKI AWARDED 2019 FELLOWSHIP: "ANYTHING YOU CAN DO, I CAN DO...?" - A CABARET

In the spring semester of 2019, Amy S. Osatinski and Jim Bray were awarded a summer fellowship from the Graduate College at UNI to create a piece of theatre. Our newest professors applied to create a show that spoke to the university's mission regarding diversity and inclusion, while highlighting representation in the Musical Theatre industry. The hope was to provide a platform for our students to become a part of those conversations.

Amy and Jim chose the form of a cabaret for several reasons. The form afforded them the opportunity to perform material outside the context for which it was written, where casting outside of type can be unacceptable. It also allowed the combining of existing music with new dialogue that addresses the themes and ideas explored, while shedding new light on familiar Musical Theatre material. Because of the freedom of the form, a cabaret allowed Dr. Osatinski and Professor Bray to address current conversations happening in the world and in our industry, which is not always possible with pre-existing material.

"Originally titled 'Songs We Shouldn't Sing', we (Jim and Amy) spent June and July doing research, sourcing music, and writing a script. Then in August, we invited our students Tatiana Sandoval, Abigail Chagolla, Caroline Henry, Zoella Sneed and local musician Seth Butler to join us. As we developed the production, the original title didn't fit the message of the piece, so we changed it to *Anything You Can Do, I Can Do...? A Cabaret*." - Dr. Amy S. Osatinski

Highly regarded by our community and patrons, "*Anything You Can Do, I Can Do...?*" had performances in the Bertha Martin Theatre in early September, and a final performance in late September, hosted by COR at 220 E. 4th St. in Waterloo. Check out the article in *The Northern Iowan* featuring Jim and Amy's fellowship achievement [here](#).



## WOMEN IN SCIENCE AND THE ARTS PANEL

In Spring 2019, TheatreUNI partnered with Theatre Cedar Rapids to present a panel on "Women in Science and the Arts." The panel was held on the UNI campus and at TCR in Cedar Rapids in conjunction with TheatreUNI's production of Karen Zacharias' *Legacy of Light* and TCR's Beyond the Stage initiative for which the 2019 theme was "She is Fierce." The UNI panel featured women from the Cedar Valley who are

leaders in the arts and science: TheatreUNI Assistant Professor of Directing, Dr. Amy S. Osatinski; TheatreUNI student dramaturg, Kaileigh Sizemore (Class of 2019); Dr. Siobahn Morgan, head of UNI's Earth and Environmental Sciences Department; Carla Lienhard, engineer at John Deere in Waterloo; Lisa Kelly, director of TCR's *Ada and the Memory Engine*; and Jessica Link, Ada in *Ada and the Memory Engine*

and TheatreUNI alumni. The panel was moderated by Rachel Morgan from UNI's Department of Languages and Literatures, and covered a wide range of topics from the challenges women face in the sciences, to the lack of women in leadership roles in the arts. The panel was a precursor to *Legacy of Light*, which ran for two weekends in February and March 2019 (see next page).







# LEGACY OF LIGHT



*Legacy of Light*, by Karen Zacharias, tells the story of little known 16th century French scientist Emilie Du Chatalet, and the legacy of work and family that she left behind after her untimely death in childbirth in 1749. Loosely based on what is known of Du Chatalet, including her passionate affair with Voltaire and her contributions to the science of light and energy, the play is set in two time periods, the 1740s and current day, and examines the life and legacies of two female scientists, Du Chatalet and a fictitious astrophysicist, Olivia.

Director Amy Osatinski was inspired by the show's scientific content to invite UNI's President Mark Nook, who holds an MA in Astrophysics and a PhD in Astronomy, to talk with the students in the cast about the birth of planets.

The show also featured several student designers, Chris Hanian (TheatreUNI Class of 2019) and Tommy Truelsen (UNI School of Music Class of 2019). Hanian designed the lighting for the show, complete with a constellation of Edison bulbs that hung in the sky and a tree strung with LEDs. Truelsen composed original music for the show that tied together the two time periods and supported the mood and theme of the production.

After graduation, Hanian spent summer 2019 as an electrics intern at the New London Barn Playhouse in New Hampshire where he will return as Master Electrician and designer for their 2021 season. Hanian currently lives in Minneapolis where he plans to attend University of Minnesota to further his studies in theatre.

Truelsen spent summer 2019 as a Sound Design Fellow at the Hangar Theatre in Ithaca, New York, before returning to Iowa where he has designed several productions for Theatre Cedar Rapids, and will be designing the upcoming World Premiere of *The Suffragist*, a new musical by retired UNI School of Music Professor Nancy Hill Cobb and playwright Cavan Hallman. Tommy is also currently designing for a 9-part audio play series for Rec Room Arts in Houston, Texas.

# DONOR PROFILES

**The Karbula Family established a scholarship that provides support for an outstanding undergraduate junior or senior student majoring in Theatre Education.**

John and Julie Karbula believe their college education played a vital role in their growth and development as people and professionals. Both realized the huge role their university years played in shaping their future opportunities as well as allowing them to more deeply explore the things that would be important to them as they grew, matured and entered fully into adult life.

John is a third-generation public educator, now in his 34th year as a teacher, principal and central office administrator. He grew up admiring his maternal grandmother, who graduated in the early 1920's from the University of Iowa and his own father, who was a first generation high school graduate who attended college on the GI Bill. His father, Roy, received both his undergraduate and master's degree from UNI. "My father had a 40 year career of helping students and being a vital part of the community. My mother was also a career educator, spending 30 years as an elementary and central office secretary. In their words, but most importantly, in their actions, they showed me and my five siblings that giving was a core value. 'Nothing makes you richer than giving,' is a message they preached and lived."

Julie too knows the value of education to transform lives. As a career fundraiser for universities in Colorado and California, she raised millions of scholarship dollars over her career. Their two daughters, Caitlin and Lauren, have followed in mom and dad's footsteps. Caitlin is a fundraiser at the University of Washington in Seattle, Washington, and Lauren is a fourth-generation public educator, working as a fourth grade teacher in Dallas, Texas.

"Julie and I hope to play a small role in helping students at our respective undergraduate institutions to realize their own dreams and fulfill their own potential. My mom and dad were certainly right: there are no greater riches than giving."

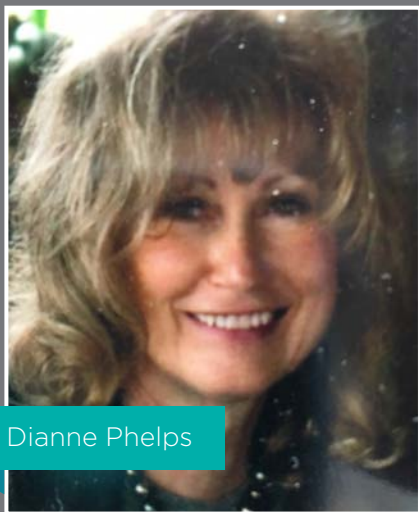


The Karbula Family

## CREATORS OF KARBULA FAMILY SCHOLARSHIP FOR EXCELLENCE IN THEATRE EDUCATION

"It's very satisfying to continue to make an impact on students as a donor instead of as a fundraiser. John and I really enjoy finding out who our latest scholarship recipients are, and hearing about their lives and goals."

- Julie Karbula



Dianne Phelps

**Long-time TheatreUNI supporter Dianne Phelps has provided funding that is primarily intended to help students attend combined auditions and theatre-specific conferences.**

I was born in Iowa and have lived here ever since. I moved to Waterloo in 1965 and went to Allen Memorial Hospital School of Nursing. I received my RN in 1968 and worked for 30 years — mostly in Orthopedics. After my late husband Dale retired, we both took classes in UNI's Art Department. My husband graduated with a BFA after retiring from an orthopedic surgery practice. I have three stepchildren and six grandchildren, none of whom live in the area.

I have served on a couple of community boards, enjoyed gardening on the farm, cooking, traveling with friends and walking with my new dog, Jesse. The last few years I continued to enjoy what Waterloo-Cedar Falls had to offer. That being — until Covid 19 — the GBPAC, the Waterloo-Cedar Falls Symphony, community theatres, and especially The Strayer-Wood Theatre. The talent of the students made me proud and entertained every time. Seeing friends more often was also of great importance — before COVID 19. I miss those events in my life but I still feel very thankful for many things and I look forward to the time when I can resume attendance at performing arts events.

## CREATOR OF PHELPS CONFERENCE/ AUDITION SUPPORT FUND



# YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

While we are unable to engage with our public right now due to the pandemic, TheatreUNI students and faculty continue to engage creatively and embrace the theatre training that is at the heart of what we do. Like everyone, we are anxious for the time when we can welcome audiences back into our home, the Strayer-Wood Theatre. Support for both students and program enhancement are critical during this challenging period — and will become even more important as we return to producing work for the stage and preparing our students for the future.

We hope that you will consider contributing to one of the funds described below in order to ensure the continuation of excellence at TheatreUNI.

## EDELNANT THEATRE ENHANCEMENT FUND

Help honor Jay Edelnant's UNI Career! Jay retired from UNI in May of 2017 — after 45 years! We are currently working to endow a fund in Jay's name: The Edelnant Theatre Enhancement Fund. Once endowed, this fund will generate at least a \$1,000 scholarship for a deserving Theatre student, and will also be used to support students pursuing professional internships by helping to defray their housing costs.

## THETA ALPHA PHI SCHOLARSHIP ACCOUNT

This endowed scholarship is reserved for those excellent students in our department whose achievements and contributions represent the highest quality. The fund was originally started by a group of alum in the 1930s to help build a new theatre. As the fund grew, the interest generated went to scholarships, making it the oldest existing theatre scholarship fund. When the Strayer-Wood Theatre was built in 1978, alumni ensured the tradition of sponsoring a scholarship for future TAP members by raising \$40,000 and permanently endowing this scholarship fund. Typically the awarding of this scholarship provides substantial tuition support for two or three students every year.

## STRAYER-WOOD THEATRE ACCOUNT

This unrestricted account allows us to do many things, including supporting the residencies of guest artists. We believe our students' education is enhanced when they are exposed to techniques and experiences from artists representing the broader world of theatre. Past guest artist residencies have provided experiences in Acting for the Camera, Shakespearean texts and performance, professional scenic painting technique and collaborations with professional costume, sound and scenic designers.

## CHARLOTTE EILERS OUTREACH & SCHOLARSHIP FUND

This fund was established in Fall 1999 in honor of the years of dedicated teaching and service Professor Eilers contributed to the University of Northern Iowa and the Cedar Valley in promoting and ensuring quality educational theatre experiences for classroom teachers and young people.

The purpose of the fund is to insure that monies are available to establish and maintain drama programs in every school throughout the Cedar Valley, and bring theatre to the lives of all students. Funding will provide individual student scholarships so that any student, regardless of economic circumstances, has access to any of the fee-bearing programs and classes of the Sturgis Youth Theatre.

**Thank you for your consideration in helping us achieve current and future goals!** Please visit [this page](#) for information about how to contribute to TheatreUNI. Contributions can also be made by check (made out to UNI Foundation with the desired account name in the memo area). Please mail checks to: UNI Foundation Financial Services, 121 Commons, Cedar Falls, IA 50614-0239.

*Cabaret, TheatreUNI, 2019*



**UNI**

University of Northern Iowa  
Department of Theatre